THE RING AND THE BOOK

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL I

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Posizione
Di tutta la Causa Criminale
Contro
Guido Franceschini Nobile
Aretino, e suoi Sicarij Stati
fatti morire in Roma il dì 22
Febb^io 1698
Il primo con la decollazione gl'altri
quattro di Forca

Romana Homicidiorum

Disputatur an et quando Maritus
possit occidere Vxorem
Adulteram
absque incursu pœnæ Grd^is

(Reduced facsimile of Title-page of Report of the Trial of Guido Franceschini.)

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THE RING AND THE BOOK

1868–9

I

THE RING AND THE BOOK

Do you see this Ring?
'T is Rome-work, made to match
(By Castellani's imitative craft)
Etrurian circlets found, some happy morn,
After a dropping April, found alive
Spark-like 'mid unearthed slope-side figtree-roots
That roof old tombs at Chiusi soft, you see,
Yet crisp as jewel-cutting There 's one trick,
(Craftsmen instruct me) one approved device
And but one, fits such slivers of pure gold
As this was,—such mere oozings from the mine,

Virgin as oval tawny pendent tear
At beehive-edge when ripened combs o'erflow,—
To bear the file's tooth and the hammer's tap
Since hammer needs must widen out the round,
And file emboss it fine with lily-flowers,
Ere the stuff grow a ring-thing right to wear
That trick is, the artificer melts up wax
With honey, so to speak, he mingles gold
With gold's alloy, and, duly tempering both,
Effects a manageable mass, then works
But his work ended, once the thing a ring,
Oh, there 's repristination! Just a spirt
O' the proper fiery acid o'er its face,
And forth the alloy unfastened flies in fume
While, self sufficient now, the shape remains,
The rondure brave, the lilied loveliness,
Gold as it was, is, shall be evermore
Prime nature with an added artistry—
No carat lost, and you have gained a ring
What of it? 'T is a figure, a symbol, say,
A thing's sign now for the thing signified

Do you see this square old yellow Book, I toss
I' the air, and catch again, and twirl about
By the crumpled vellum covers,—pure crude fact
Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,

And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since?
Examine it yourselves! I found this book,
Cave a *lira* for it, eightpence English just,
(Mark the predestination!) when a Hand,
Always above my shoulder, pushed me once,
One day still fierce 'mid many a day struck calm,
Across a Square in Florence, crammed with booths,
Buzzing and blaze, noontide and market-time,
Toward Baccio's marble,—ay, the basement-ledge
O' the pedestal where sits and menaces
John of the Black Bands with the upright spear,
'Twixt palace and church,—Riccardi where they lived,
His race, and San Lorenzo where they lie
This book,—precisely on that palace-step
Which, meant for lounging knaves o' the Medici,
Now serves re-venders to display their ware,—
Mongst odds and ends of ravage, picture-frames
White through the worn gilt, mirror-sconces chipped,
Bronze angel-heads once knobs attached to chests,
(Handled when ancient dames chose forth brocade)
Modern chalk drawings, studies from the nude,
Samples of stone, jet, breccia, porphyry
Polished and rough, sundry amazing busts
In baked earth, (broken, Providence be praised!)
A wreck of tapestry, proudly-purposed web
When reds and blues were indeed red and blue,

Now offered as a mat to save bare feet
(Since carpets constitute a cruel cost)
Treading the chill scagliola bedward then
A pile of brown-etched prints, two *crazie* each,
Stopped by a conch a-top from fluttering forth
—Sowing the Square with works of one and the same
Master, the imaginative Sienese
Great in the scenic backgrounds—(name and fame
None of you know, nor does he fare the worse)
From these Oh, with a Lionard going cheap
If it should prove, as promised, that Joconde
Whereof a copy contents the Louvre!—these
I picked this book from Five compeers in flank
Stood left and right of it as tempting more—
A dogseared Spicilegium, the fond tale
O' the Frail One of the Flower, by young Dumas,
Vulgarized Horace for the use of schools,
The Life, Death, Miracles of Saint Somebody,
Saint Somebody Else, his Miracles, Death and Life,—
With this, one glance at the lettered back of which,
And "Stall!" cried I a *lira* made it mine

Here it is, this I toss and take again,
Small quarto size, part print part manuscript
A book in shape but, really, pure crude fact
Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,

And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since
Give it me back! The thing's restorative
I' the touch and sight

That memorable day,
(June was the month, Lorenzo named the Square)
I leaned a little and overlooked my prize
By the low railing round the fountain-source
Close to the statue, where a step descends
While clinked the cans of copper, as stooped and rose
Thick-ankled girls who brimmed them, and made place
For marketmen glad to pitch basket down,
Dip a broad melon-leaf that holds the wet,
And whisk their faded fresh And on I read
Presently, though my path grew perilous
Between the outspread straw-work, piles of plait
Soon to be flapping, each o'er two black eyes
And swathe of Tuscan hair, on festas fine
Through fire-irons, tribes of tongs, shovels in sheaves,
Skeleton bedsteads, wardrobe-drawers agape,
Rows of tall slim brass lamps with dangling gear,—
And worse, cast clothes a-sweetening in the sun
None of them took my eye from off my prize
Still read I on, from written title-page
To written index, on, through street and street,
At the Strozzi, at the Pillar, at the Bridge,

Till, by the time I stood at home again
In Casa Guidi by Felice Church,
Under the doorway where the black begins -
With the first stone-slab of the staircase cold,
I had mastered the contents, knew the whole truth
Gathered together, bound up in this book,
Print three-fifths, written supplement the rest
"*Romana Homicidiorum*"—nay,
Better translate—"A Roman murder case
"Position of the entire criminal cause
"Of Guido Franceschini, nobleman,
"With certain Four the cutthroats in his pay,
"Tried, all five, and found guilty and put to death
"By heading or hanging as befitted ranks,
"At Rome on February Twenty Two,
"Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight
"Wherein it is disputed if, and when,
"Husbands may kill adulterous wives, yet 'scape
"The customary forfeit"

Word for word,
So ran the title-page murder, or else
Legitimate punishment of the other crime,
Accounted murder by mistake,—just that
And no more, in a Latin cramp enough
When the law had her eloquence to launch,

But interfilleted with Italian streaks
When testimony stooped to mother-tongue,—
That, was this old square yellow book about

Now, as the ingot, ere the ring was forged,
Lay gold, (beseech you, hold that figure fast!)
So, in this book lay absolutely truth,
Fanciless fact, the documents indeed,
Primary lawyer-pleadings for, against,
The aforesaid Five, real summed-up circumstance
Adduced in proof of these on either side,
Put forth and printed, as the practice was,
At Rome, in the Apostolic Chamber's type,
And so submitted to the eye o' the Court
Presided over by His Reverence
Rome's Governor and Criminal Judge,—the trial
Itself, to all intents, being then as now
Here in the book and nowise out of it,
Seeing, there properly was no judgment bar,
No bringing of accuser and accused,
And whoso judged both parties, face to face
Before some court, as we conceive of courts
There was a Hall of Justice, that came last
For Justice had a chamber by the hall
Where she took evidence first, summed up the same,
Then sent accuser and accused alike,

In person of the advocate of each,
To weigh its worth, thereby arrange, array
The battle 'T was the so-styled Fisc began,
Pleaded (and since he only spoke in print
The printed voice of him lives now as then)
The public Prosecutor—"Murder 's proved,
"With five what we call qualities of bad,
"Worse, worst, and yet worse still, and still worse yet,
"Crest over crest crowning the cockatrice,
"That beggar hell's regalia to enrich
"Count Guido Franceschini punish him!"
Thus was the paper put before the court
In the next stage, (no noisy work at all,)
To study at ease In due time like reply
Came from the so-styled Patron of the Poor,
Official mouthpiece of the five accused
Too poor to fee a better,—Guido's luck
Or else his fellows',—which, I hardly know,—
An outbreak as of wonder at the world,
A fury-fit of outraged innocence,
A passion of betrayed simplicity
"Punish Count Guido? For what crime, what hint
"O' the colour of a crime, inform us first!
"Reward him rather! Recognize, we say,
"In the deed done, a righteous judgment dealt!
"All conscience and all courage,—there 's our Count

"Characterèd in a word, and, what 's more strange,
"He had companionship in privilege,
"Found four courageous conscientious friends
"Absolve, applaud all five, as props of law,
"Sustainers of society!—perchance
"A trifle over-hasty with the hand
"To hold her tottering ark, had tumbled else,
"But that 's a splendid fault whereat we wink,
"Wishing your cold correctness sparkled so!"
Thus paper second followed paper first,
Thus did the two join issue—nay, the four,
Each pleader having an adjunct "True, he killed
"—So to speak—in a certain sort—his wife,
"But laudably, since thus it happed!" quoth one
Whereat, more witness and the case postponed
"Thus it happed not, since thus he did the deed,
"And proved himself thereby portentousest
"Of cutthroats and a prodigy of crime,
"As the woman that he slaughtered was a saint,
"Martyr and miracle!" quoth the other to match
Again, more witness, and the case postponed
"A miracle, ay—of lust and impudence,
"Hear my new reasons!" interposed the first
"—Coupled with more of mine!" pursued his peer
"Beside, the precedents, the authorities!"
From both at once a cry with an echo, that!

That was a firebrand at each fox's tail
Unleashed in a cornfield soon spread flare enough
As hurtled thither and there heaped themselves
From earth's four corners, all authority
And precedent for putting wives to death,
Or letting wives live, sinful as they seem
How legislated, now, in this respect,
Solon and his Athenians? Quote the code
Of Romulus and Rome! Justinian speak!
Nor modern Baldo, Bartolo be dumb!
The Roman voice was potent, plentiful;
Cornelia de Sicariis hurried to help
Pompeia de Parricidiis, Julia de
Something-or-other jostled *Lex* this-and-that,
King Solomon confirmed Apostle Paul
That nice decision of Dolabella, eh?
That pregnant instance of Theodoric, oh!
Down to that choice example Ælian gives
(An instance I find much insisted on)
Of the elephant who, brute-beast though he were,
Yet understood and punished on the spot
His master's naughty spouse and faithless friend,
A true tale which has edified each child,
Much more shall flourish favoured by our court!
Pages of proof this way, and that way proof,
And always—once again the case postponed

Thus wrangled, brangled, jangled they a month,
—Only on paper, pleadings all in print,
Nor ever was, except i' the brains of men,
More noise by word of mouth than you hear now—
Till the court cut all short with "Judged, your cause
"Receive our sentence! Praise God! We pronounce
"Count Guido devilish and damnable
"His wife Pompilia in thought, word and deed,
"Was perfect pure, he murdered her for that
"As for the Four who helped the One, all Five—
"Why, let employer and hirelings share alike
"In guilt and guilt's reward, the death their due!"

So was the trial at end, do you suppose?
"Guilty you find him, death you doom him to?
"Ay, were not Guido, more than needs, a priest,
"Priest and to spare!"—this was a shot reserved,
I learn this from epistles which begin
Here where the print ends,—see the pen and ink
Of the advocate, the ready at a pinch!—
"My client boasts the clerkly privilege,
"Has taken minor orders many enough,
"Shows still sufficient chrism upon his pate
"To neutralize a blood-stain *presbyter*,
"*Primæ tonsuræ, subdiaconus*,
"*Sacerdos*, so he slips from underneath

"Your power, the temporal, slides inside the robe
"Of mother Church to her we make appeal
"By the Pope, the Church's head!"

A parlous plea,
Put in with noticeable effect, it seems,
"Since straight,"—resumes the zealous orator,
Making a friend acquainted with the facts,—
"Once the word 'clericality' let fall,
"Procedure stopped and freer breath was drawn
"By all considerate and responsible Rome"
Quality took the decent part, of course,
Held by the husband, who was noble too:
Or, for the matter of that, a churl would side
With too-refined susceptibility,
And honour which, tender in the extreme,
Stung to the quick, must roughly right itself
At all risks, not sit still and whine for law
As a Jew would, if you squeezed him to the wall,
Brisk-trotting through the Ghetto Nay, it seems,
Even the Emperor's Envoy had his say
To say on the subject, might not see, unmoved,
Civility menaced throughout Christendom
By too harsh measure dealt her champion here
Lastly, what made all safe, the Pope was kind,
From his youth up, reluctant to take life,

If mercy might be just and yet show grace,
Much more unlikely then, in extreme age,
To take a life the general sense bade spare
'T was plain that Guido would go scatheless yet

But human promise, oh, how short of shine!
How topple down the piles of hope we rear!
How history proves nay, read Herodotus!
Suddenly starting from a nap, as it were,
A dog-sleep with one shut, one open orb,
Cried the Pope's great self,—Innocent by name
And nature too, and eighty-six years old,
Antonio Pignatelli of Naples, Pope
Who had trod many lands, known many deeds,
Probed many hearts, beginning with his own,
And now was far in readiness for God,—
'T was he who first bade leave those souls in peace,
Those Jansenists, re-nicknamed Molinists,
('Gainst whom the cry went, like a frowsy tune,
Tickling men's ears—the sect for a quarter of an hour
I' the teeth of the world which, clown-like, loves to chew
Be it but a straw 'twixt work and whistling while,
Taste some vituperation, bite away,
Whether at marjoram-sprig or garlic-clove,
Aught it may sport with, spoil, and then spit forth)
"Leave them alone," bade he, "those Molinists!

"Who may have other light than we perceive,
"Or why is it the whole world hates them thus?"
Also he peeled off that last scandal-rag
Of Nepotism, and so observed the poor
That men would merrily say, "Halt, deaf and blind,
"Who feed on fat things, leave the master's self
"To gather up the fragments of his feast,
'These be the nephews of Pope Innocent!—
"His own meal costs but five carlines a day,
"Poor-priest's allowance, for he claims no more"
—He cried of a sudden, this great good old Pope,
When they appealed in last resort to him,
"I have mastered the whole matter I nothing doubt
"Though Guido stood forth priest from head to heel,
"Instead of, as alleged, a piece of one,—
"And further, were he, from the tonsured scalp
"To the sandaled sole of him, my son and Christ's,
"Instead of touching us by finger-tip
"As you assert, and pressing up so close
"Only to set a blood-smutch on our robe,—
"I and Christ would renounce all right in him
"Am I not Pope, and presently to die,
"And busied how to render my account,
"And shall I wait a day ere I decide
"On doing or not doing justice here?
"Cut off his head to-morrow by this time,

"Hang up his four mates, two on either hand,
"And end one business more!"

So said, so done—
Rather so writ, for the old Pope bade this,
I find, with his particular chirograph,
His own no such infirm hand, Friday night,
And next day, February Twenty Two,
Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight,
—Not at the proper head-and-hanging-place
On bridge-foot close by Castle Angelo,
Where custom somewhat staled the spectacle,
('T was not so well i' the way of Rome, beside,
The noble Rome, the Rome of Guido's rank)
But at the city's newer gayer end,—
The cavalcading promenading place
Beside the gate and opposite the church
Under the Pincian gardens green with Spring,
'Neath the obelisk 'twixt the fountains in the Square,
Did Guido and his fellows find their fate,
All Rome for witness, and—my writer adds—
Remonstrant in its universal grief,
Since Guido had the suffrage of all Rome

This is the bookful, thus far take the truth,
The untempered gold, the fact untampered with,

The mere ring-metal ere the ring be made!
And what has hitherto come of it? Who preserves
The memory of this Guido, and his wife
Pompilia, more than Ademollo's name,
The etcher of those prints, two *crazie* each,
Saved by a stone from snowing broad the Square
With scenic backgrounds? Was this truth of force?
Able to take its own part as truth should,
Sufficient, self-sustaining? Why, if so—
Yonder 's a fire, into it goes my book,
As who shall say me nay, and what the loss?
You know the tale already I may ask,
Rather than think to tell you, more thereof,—
Ask you not merely who were he and she,
Husband and wife, what manner of mankind,
But how you hold concerning this and that
Other yet-unnamed actor in the piece
The young frank handsome courtly Canon, now,
The priest, declared the lover of the wife,
He who, no question, did elope with her,
For certain bring the tragedy about,
Giuseppe Caponsacchi,—his strange course
I' the matter, was it right or wrong or both?
Then the old couple, slaughtered with the wife
By the husband as accomplices in crime,
Those Comparini, Pietro and his spouse,—

What say you to the right or wrong of that,
When, at a known name whispered through the door
Of a lone villa on a Christmas night,
It opened that the joyous hearts inside
Might welcome as it were an angel-guest
Come in Christ's name to knock and enter, sup
And satisfy the loving ones he saved,
And so did welcome devils and their death?
I have been silent on that circumstance
Although the couple passed for close of kin
To wife and husband, were by some accounts
Pompilia's very parents you know best
Also that infant the great joy was for,
That Gaetano, the wife's two weeks' babe,
The husband's first-born child, his son and heir,
Whose birth and being turned his night to day—
Why must the father kill the mother thus
Because she bore his son and saved himself?

Well, British Public, ye who like me not,
(God love you!) and will have your proper laugh
At the dark question, laugh it! I laugh first
Truth must prevail, the proverb vows, and truth
—Here is it all i' the book at last, as first
There it was all i' the heads and hearts of Rome
Gentle and simple, never to fall nor fade

Nor be forgotten Yet, a little while,
The passage of a century or so,
Decads thrice five, and here 's time paid his tax,
Oblivion gone home with her harvesting,
And all left smooth again as scythe could shave
Far from beginning with you London folk,
I took my book to Rome first, tried truth's power
On likely people "Have you met such names?
' Is a tradition extant of such facts?
" Your law-courts stand, your records frown a-row
" What if I rove and rummage?" "—Why, you 'll waste
" Your pains and end as wise as you began!"
Everyone snickered "names and facts thus old
" Are newer much than Europe news we find
" Down in to day's *Diario* Records, quotha?
" Why, the French burned them, what else do the French?
" The rap and-rending nation! And it tells
" Against the Church, no doubt,—another gird
" At the Temporality, your Trial, of course?"
" —Quite otherwise this time," submitted I,
" Clean for the Church and dead against the world,
" The flesh and the devil, does it tell for once"
" —The rarer and the happier! All the same,
" Content you with your treasure of a book,

"And waive what 's wanting! Take a friend's advice!
"It 's not the custom of the country Mend
"Your ways indeed and we may stretch a point
"Go get you manned by Manning and new manned
"By Newman and, mayhap, wise-manned to boot
"By Wiseman, and we 'll see or else we won't!
"Thanks meantime for the story, long and strong,
"A pretty piece of narrative enough,
"Which scarce ought so to drop out, one would think,
"From the more curious annals of our kind
"Do you tell the story, now, in off-hand style,
"Straight from the book? Or simply here and there,
"(The while you vault it through the loose and large)
"Hang to a hint? Or is there book at all,
"And don't you deal in poetry, make-believe,
"And the white lies it sounds like?"

Yes and no!
From the book, yes, thence bit by bit I dug
The lingot truth, that memorable day,
Assayed and knew my piecemeal gain was gold,—
Yes, but from something else surpassing that,
Something of mine which, mixed up with the mass,
Made it bear hammer and be firm to file
Fancy with fact is just one fact the more,
To-wit, that fancy has informed, transpierced,

Thridded and so thrown fast the facts else flee,
As right through ring and ring runs the djereed
And binds the loose, one bar without a break
I fused my live soul and that inert stuff,
Before attempting smithcraft, on the night
After the day when,—truth thus grasped and gained,—
The book was shut and done with and laid by
On the cream coloured massive agate, broad
Neath the twin cherubs in the tarnished frame
O' the mirror, tall thence to the ceiling-top
And from the reading, and that slab I leant
My elbow on, the while I read and read,
I turned, to free myself and find the world,
And stepped out on the narrow terrace, built
Over the street and opposite the church,
And paced its lozenge-brickwork sprinkled cool,
Because Felice church-side stretched, a-glow
Through each square window fringed for festival,
Whence came the clear voice of the cloistered ones
Chanting a chant made for midsummer nights—
I know not what particular praise of God,
It always came and went with June Beneath
I' the street, quick shown by openings of the sky
When flame fell silently from cloud to cloud,
Richer than that gold snow Jove rained on Rhodes,
The townsmen walked by twos and threes, and talked,

Drinking the blackness in default of air—
A busy human sense beneath my feet
While in and out the terrace-plants and round
One branch of tall datura, waxed and waned
The lamp fly lured there, wanting the white flower
Over the roof o' the lighted church I looked
A bowshot to the street's end, north away
Out of the Roman gate to the Roman road
By the river, till I felt the Apennine
And there would lie Arezzo, the man's town,
The woman's trap and cage and torture-place,
Also the stage where the priest played his part,
A spectacle for angels,—ay, indeed,
There lay Arezzo! Farther then I fared,
Feeling my way on through the hot and dense,
Romeward, until I found the wayside inn
By Castelnuovo's few mean hut-like homes
Huddled together on the hill-foot bleak,
Bare, broken only by that tree or two
Against the sudden bloody splendour poured
Cursewise in day's departure by the sun
O'er the low house-roof of that squalid inn
Where they three, for the first time and the last,
Husband and wife and priest, met face to face
Whence I went on again, the end was near,
Step by step, missing none and marking all,

Till Rome itself, the ghastly goal, I reached
Why, all the while,—how could it otherwise?—
The life in me abolished the death of things,
Deep calling unto deep as then and there
Acted itself over again once more
The tragic piece I saw with my own eyes
In Florence as I trod the terrace, breathed
The beauty and the fearfulness of night,
How it had run, this round from Rome to Rome—
Because, you are to know, they lived at Rome,
Pompilia's parents, as they thought themselves,
Two poor ignoble hearts who did their best
Part God's way, part the other way than God's,
To somehow make a shift and scramble through
The world's mud, careless if it splashed and spoiled,
Provided they might so hold high, keep clean
Their child's soul, one soul white enough for three,
And lift it to whatever star should stoop,
What possible sphere of purer life than theirs
Should come in aid of whiteness hard to save
I saw the star stoop, that they strained to touch,
And did touch and depose their treasure on,
As Guido Franceschini took away
Pompilia to be his for evermore,
While they sang "Now let us depart in peace,
"Having beheld thy glory, Guido's wife!"

I saw the star supposed, but fog o' the fen,
Gilded star-fashion by a glint from hell,
Having been heaved up, haled on its gross way,
By hands unguessed before, invisible help
From a dark brotherhood, and specially
Two obscure goblin creatures, foxfaced this,
Cat clawed the other, called his next of kin
By Guido the main monster,—cloaked and caped,
Making as they were priests, to mock God more,—
Abate Paul, Canon Girolamo
These who had rolled the starlike pest to Rome
And stationed it to suck up and absorb
The sweetness of Pompilia, rolled again
That bloated bubble, with her soul inside,
Back to Arezzo and a palace there—
Or say, a fissure in the honest earth
Whence long ago had curled the vapour first,
Blown big by nether fires to appal day
It touched home, broke, and blasted far and wide
I saw the cheated couple find the cheat
And guess what foul rite they were captured for,—
Too fain to follow over hill and dale
That child of theirs caught up thus in the cloud
And carried by the Prince o' the Power of the Air
Whither he would, to wilderness or sea
I saw them, in the potency of fear,

Break somehow through the satyr-family
(For a grey mother with a monkey-mien,
Mopping and mowing, was apparent too,
As, confident of capture, all took hands
And danced about the captives in a ring)
—Saw them break through, breathe safe, at Rome again,
Saved by the selfish instinct, losing so
Their loved one left with haters These I saw,
In recrudescency of baffled hate,
Prepare to wring the uttermost revenge
From body and soul thus left them all was sure,
Fire laid and cauldron set, the obscene ring traced,
The victim stripped and prostrate what of God?
The cleaving of a cloud, a cry, a crash,
Quenched lay their cauldron, cowered i' the dust the crew,
As, in a glory of armour like Saint George,
Out again sprang the young good beauteous priest
Bearing away the lady in his arms,
Saved for a splendid minute and no more
For, whom i' the path did that priest come upon,
He and the poor lost lady borne so brave,
—Checking the song of praise in me, had else
Swelled to the full for God's will done on earth—
Whom but a dusk misfeatured messenger,

No other than the angel of this life,
Whose care is lest men see too much at once
He made the sign, such God glimpse must suffice,
Nor prejudice the Prince o' the Power of the Air,
Whose ministration piles us overhead
What we call, first, earth's roof and, last, heaven's floor,
Now grate o' the trap, then outlet of the cage
So took the lady, left the priest alone,
And once more canopied the world with black
But through the blackness I saw Rome again,
And where a solitary villa stood
In a lone garden quarter it was eve,
The second of the year, and oh so cold!
Ever and anon there flittered through the air
A snow flake, and a scanty couch of snow
Crusted the grass-walk and the garden-mould
All was grave, silent, sinister,—when, ha?
Glimmeringly did a pack of were wolves pad
The snow, those flames were Guido's eyes in front,
And all five found and footed it, the track,
To where a threshold-streak of warmth and light
Betrayed the villa-door with life inside,
While an inch outside were those blood-bright eyes,
And black lips wrinkling o'er the flash of teeth,
And tongues that lolled—Oh God that madest man!
They parleyed in their language Then one whined—

That was the policy and master stroke—
Deep in his throat whispered what seemed a name—
"Open to Caponsacchi!" Guido cried
"Gabriel!" cried Lucifer at Eden gate
Wide as a heart, opened the door at once,
Showing the joyous couple, and their child
The two-weeks' mother, to the wolves, the wolves
To them Close eyes! And when the corpses lay
Stark-stretched, and those the wolves, their wolf-work done,
Were safe embosomed by the night again,
I knew a necessary change in things,
As when the worst watch of the night gives way,
And there comes duly, to take cognizance,
The scrutinizing eye point of some star—
And who despairs of a new daybreak now?
Lo, the first ray protruded on those five!
It reached them, and each felon writhed transfixed
Awhile they palpitated on the spear
Motionless over Tophet stand or fall?
"I say, the spear should fall—should stand, I say!"
Cried the world come to judgment, granting grace
Or dealing doom according to world's wont,
Those world's-bystanders grouped on Rome's cross road
At prick and summons of the primal curse

Which bids man love as well as make a lie
There prattled they, discoursed the right and wrong,
Turned wrong to right, proved wolves sheep and sheep wolves,
So that you scarce distinguished fell from fleece,
Till out spoke a great guardian of the fold,
Stood up, put forth his hand that held the crook,
And motioned that the arrested point decline
Horribly off, the wriggling dead-weight reeled,
Rushed to the bottom and lay ruined there
Though still at the pit's mouth, despite the smoke
O' the burning, tarriers turned again to talk
And trim the balance, and detect at least
A touch of wolf in what showed whitest sheep,
A cross of sheep redeeming the whole wolf,—
Vex truth a little longer —less and less,
Because years came and went, and more and more
Brought new lies with them to be loved in turn
Till all at once the memory of the thing,—
The fact that, wolves or sheep, such creatures were,—
Which hitherto, however men supposed,
Had somehow plain and pillar-like prevailed
I' the midst of them, indisputably fact,
Granite, time's tooth should grate against, not graze,—
Why, this proved sandstone, friable, fast to fly
And give its grain away at wish o' the wind

Ever and ever more diminutive,
Base gone, shaft lost, only entablature,
Dwindled into no bigger than a book,
Lay of the column, and that little, left
By the roadside 'mid the ordure, shards and weeds
Until I haply, wandering that lone way,
Kicked it up, turned it over, and recognized,
For all the crumblement, this abacus,
This square old yellow book,—could calculate
By this the lost proportions of the style

This was it from, my fancy with those facts,
I used to tell the tale, turned gay to grave,
But lacked a listener seldom, such alloy,
Such substance of me interfused the gold
Which, wrought into a shapely ring therewith,
Hammered and filed, fingered and favoured, last
Lay ready for the renovating wash
O' the water "How much of the tale was true?"
I disappeared, the book grew all in all,
The lawyers' pleadings swelled back to their size,—
Doubled in two, the crease upon them yet,
For more commodity of carriage, see!—
And these are letters, veritable sheets
That brought posthaste the news to Florence, writ
At Rome the day Count Guido died, we find,

To stay the craving of a client there,
Who bound the same and so produced my book
Lovers of dead truth, did ye fare the worse?
Lovers of live truth, found ye false my tale?

Well, now, there 's nothing in nor out o' the world
Good except truth yet this, the something else,
What 's this then, which proves good yet seems untrue?
This that I mixed with truth, motions of mine
That quickened, made the inertness malleolable
O' the gold was not mine,—what 's your name for this?
Are means to the end, themselves in part the end?
Is fiction which makes fact alive, fact too?
The somehow may be thishow
I find first
Writ down for very A B C of fact,
"In the beginning God made heaven and earth,"
From which, no matter with what lisp, I spell
And speak you out a consequence—that man,
Man,—as befits the made, the inferior thing,—
Purposed, since made, to grow, not make in turn,
Yet forced to try and make, else fail to grow,—
Formed to rise, reach at, if not grasp and gain
The good beyond him,—which attempt is growth,—
Repeats God's process in man's due degree,

Attaining man's proportionate result,—
Creates, no, but resuscitates, perhaps
Inalienable, the arch-prerogative
Which turns thought act—conceives, expresses too
No less, man, bounded, yearning to be free,
May so project his surplusage of soul
In search of body, so add self to self
By owning what lay ownerless before,—
So find, so fill full, so appropriate forms—
That, although nothing which had never life
Shall get life from him, be, not having been,
Yet, something dead may get to live again,
Something with too much life or not enough,
Which, either way imperfect ended once
An end whereat man's impulse intervenes,
Makes new beginning, starts the dead alive,
Completes the incomplete and saves the thing
Man's breath were vain to light a virgin wick,—
Half burned-out, all but quite-quenched wicks o' the lamp
Stationed for temple service on this earth,
These indeed let him breathe on and relume!
For such man's feat is, in the due degree,
—Mimic creation, galvanism for life,
But still a glory portioned in the scale
Why did the mage say,—feeling as we are wont

For truth, and stopping midway short of truth,
And resting on a lie,—"I raise a ghost"?
"Because," he taught adepts, "man makes not man
"Yet by a special gift, an art of arts,
"More insight and more outsight and much more
"Will to use both of these than boast my mates,
"I can detach from me, commission forth
"Half of my soul, which in its pilgrimage
"O'er old unwandered waste ways of the world,
"May chance upon some fragment of a whole,
"Rag of flesh, scrap of bone in dim disuse,
"Smoking flax that fed fire once prompt therein
"I enter, spark-like, put old powers to play,
"Push lines out to the limit, lead forth last
"(By a moonrise through a ruin of a crypt)
"What shall be mistily seen, murmuringly heard,
"Mistakenly felt then write my name with Faust's!"
Oh, Faust, why Faust? Was not Elisha once?—
Who bade them lay his staff on a corpse face
There was no voice, no hearing he went in
Therefore, and shut the door upon them twain,
And prayed unto the Lord and he went up
And lay upon the corpse, dead on the couch,
And put his mouth upon its mouth, his eyes
Upon its eyes, his hands upon its hands,
And stretched him on the flesh, the flesh waxed warm

And he returned, walked to and fro the house,
And went up, stretched him on the flesh again,
And the eyes opened 'T is a credible feat
With the right man and way
Enough of me!
The Book! I turn its medicinable leaves
In London now till, as in Florence erst,
A spirit laughs and leaps through every limb,
And lights my eye, and lifts me by the hair,
Letting me have my will again with these
—How title I the dead alive once more?

Count Guido Franceschini the Aretine,
Descended of an ancient house, though poor,
A beak-nosed bushy bearded black-haired lord,
Lean, pallid, low of stature yet robust,
Fifty years old,—having four years ago
Married Pompilia Comparini, young,
Good, beautiful, at Rome, where she was born,
And brought her to Arezzo, where they lived
Unhappy lives, whatever curse the cause,—
This husband, taking four accomplices,
Followed this wife to Rome, where she was fled
From their Arezzo to find peace again,
In convoy, eight months earlier, of a priest,
Aretine also, of still nobler birth,

Giuseppe Caponsacchi,—caught her there
Quiet in a villa on a Christmas night,
With only Pietro and Violante by,
Both her putative parents, killed the three,
Aged, they, seventy each, and she, seventeen,
And, two weeks since, the mother of his babe
First-born and heir to what the style was worth
O' the Guido who determined, dared and did
This deed just as he purposed point by point
Then, bent upon escape, but hotly pressed,
And captured with his co-mates that same night,
He, brought to trial, stood on this defence—
Injury to his honour caused the act,
And since his wife was false, (as manifest
By flight from home in such companionship,)
Death, punishment deserved of the false wife
And faithless parents who abetted her
I' the flight aforesaid, wronged nor God nor man
"Nor false she, nor yet faithless they," replied
The accuser, "cloaked and masked this murder glooms,
"True was Pompilia, loyal too the pair,
"Out of the man's own heart a monster curled
"Which—crime coiled with connivancy at crime—
"His victim's breast, he tells you, hatched and reared,
"Uncoil we and stretch stark the worm of hell!"
A month the trial swayed this way and that

Ere judgment settled down on Guido's guilt,
Then was the Pope, that good Twelfth Innocent,
Appealed to who well weighed what went before,
Affirmed the guilt and gave the guilty doom

Let this old woe step on the stage again!
Act itself o'er anew for men to judge,
Not by the very sense and sight indeed—
(Which take at best imperfect cognizance,
Since, how heart moves brain, and how both move hand,
What mortal ever in entirety saw?)
—No dose of purer truth than man digests,
But truth with falsehood, milk that feeds him now,
Not strong meat he may get to bear some day—
To-wit, by voices we call evidence,
Uproar in the echo, live fact deadened down,
Talked over, bruited abroad, whispered away,
Yet helping us to all we seem to hear
For how else know we save by worth of word?

Here are the voices presently shall sound
In due succession First, the world's outcry
Around the rush and ripple of any fact
Fallen stonewise, plumb on the smooth face of things,
The world's guess, as it crowds the bank o' the pool,
At what were figure and substance, by their splash

Then, by vibrations in the general mind,
At depth of deed already out of reach
This threefold murder of the day before,—
Say, Half-Rome's feel after the vanished truth,
Honest enough, as the way is all the same,
Harbouring in the centre of its sense
A hidden germ of failure, shy but sure,
To neutralize that honesty and leave
That feel for truth at fault, as the way is too
Some prepossession such as starts amiss,
By but a hair's breadth at the shoulder-blade,
The arm o' the feeler, dip he ne'er so bold,
So leads arm waveringly, lets fall wide
O' the mark its finger, sent to find and fix
Truth at the bottom, that deceptive speck
With this Half-Rome,—the source of swerving, call
Over-belief in Guido's right and wrong
Rather than in Pompilia's wrong and right
Who shall say how, who shall say why? 'T is there—
The instinctive theorizing whence a fact
Looks to the eye as the eye likes the look
Gossip in a public place, a sample-speech
Some worthy, with his previous hint to find
A husband's side the safer, and no whit
Aware he is not Æacus the while,—
How such an one supposes and states fact

To whosoever of a multitude
Will listen, and perhaps prolong thereby
The not-unpleasant flutter at the breast
Born of a certain spectacle shut in
By the church Lorenzo opposite So, they lounge
Midway the mouth o' the street, on Corso side,
'Twixt palace Fiano and palace Ruspoli,
Linger and listen, keeping clear o' the crowd,
Yet wishful one could lend that crowd one's eyes,
(So universal is its plague of squint)
And make hearts beat our time that flutter false
—All for the truth's sake, mere truth, nothing else!
How Half-Rome found for Guido much excuse

Next, from Rome's other half, the opposite feel
For truth with a like swerve, like unsuccess,—
Or if success, by no skill but more luck
This time, through siding rather with the wife,
Because a fancy-fit inclined that way,
Than with the husband One wears drab, one pink,
Who wears pink, ask him "Which shall win the race,
"Of coupled runners like as egg and egg?"
"—Why, if I must choose, he with the pink scarf"
Doubtless for some such reason choice fell here
A piece of public talk to correspond
At the next stage of the story, just a day

Let pass and new day brings the proper change
Another sample-speech i' the market-place
O' the Barberini by the Capucins,
Where the old Triton, at his fountain-sport,
Bernini's creature plated to the paps,
Puffs up steel sleet which breaks to diamond dust,
A spray of sparkles snorted from his conch,
High over the cantellas, out o' the way
O' the motley merchandizing multitude
Our murder has been done three days ago,
The frost is over and gone, the south wind laughs,
And, to the very tiles of each red roof
A-smoke i' the sunshine, Rome lies gold and glad
So, listen how, to the other half of Rome,
Pompilia seemed a saint and martyr both!

Then, yet another day let come and go,
With pause prelusive still of novelty,
Hear a fresh speaker!—neither this nor that
Half-Rome aforesaid, something bred of both
One and one breed the inevitable three
Such is the personage harangues you next,
The elaborated product, *tertium quid*
Rome's first commotion in subsidence gives
The curd o' the cream, flower o' the wheat, as it were,
And finer sense o' the city Is this plain?

You get a reasoned statement of the case,
Eventual verdict of the curious few
Who care to sift a business to the bran
Nor coarsely bolt it like the simpler sort
Here, after ignorance, instruction speaks,
Here, clarity of candour, history's soul,
The critical mind, in short no gossip guess
What the superior social section thinks,
In person of some man of quality
Who,—breathing musk from lace-work and brocade,
His solitaire amid the flow of frill,
Powdered peruke on nose, and bag at back,
And cane dependent from the ruffled wrist,—
Harangues in silvery and selectest phrase
'Neath waxlight in a glorified saloon
Where mirrors multiply the girandole
Courting the approbation of no mob,
But Eminence This and All-Illustrious That
Who take snuff softly, range in well-bred ring,
Card-table-quitters for observance' sake,
Around the argument, the rational word—
Still, spite its weight and worth, a sample-speech
How Quality dissertated on the case

So much for Rome and rumour, smoke comes first
Once let smoke rise untroubled, we descry

Clearlier what tongues of flame may spire and spit
To eye and ear, each with appropriate tinge
According to its food, or pure or foul
The actors, no mere rumours of the act,
Intervene First you hear Count Guido's voice,
In a small chamber that adjoins the court,
Where Governor and Judges, summoned thence,
Tommati, Venturini and the rest,
Find the accused ripe for declaring truth
Soft-cushioned sits he, yet shifts seat, shirks touch,
As, with a twitchy brow and wincing lip
And cheek that changes to all kinds of white,
He proffers his defence, in tones subdued
Near to mock-mildness now, so mournful seems
The obtuser sense truth fails to satisfy,
Now, moved, from pathos at the wrong endured,
To passion, for the natural man is roused
At fools who first do wrong then pour the blame
Of their wrong-doing, Satan-like, on Job
Also his tongue at times is hard to curb,
Incisive, nigh satiric bites the phrase,
Rough-raw, yet somehow claiming privilege
—It is so hard for shrewdness to admit
Folly means no harm when she calls black white!
—Eruption momentary at the most,
Modified forthwith by a fall o' the fire,

Sage acquiescence, for the world 's the world,
And, what it errs in, Judges rectify
He feels he has a fist, then folds his arms
Crosswise and makes his mind up to be meek.
And never once does he detach his eye
From those ranged there to slay him or to save,
But does his best man's-service for himself,
Despite,—what twitches brow and makes lip wince,—
His limbs' late taste of what was called the Cord,
Or Vigil torture more facetiously
Even so, they were wont to tease the truth
Out of loth witness (toying, trifling time)
By torture 't was a trick, a vice of the age,
Here, there and everywhere, what would you have?
Religion used to tell Humanity
She gave him warrant or denied him course
And since the course was much to his own mind,
Of pinching flesh and pulling bone from bone
To unhusk truth a-hiding in its hulls,
Nor whisper of a warning stopped the way,
He, in their joint behalf, the burly slave,
Besturred him, mauled and maimed all recusants,
While, prim in place, Religion overlooked,
And so had done till doomsday, never a sign
Nor sound of interference from her mouth,
But that at last the burly slave wiped brow,

Let eye give notice as if soul were there,
Muttered "'T is a vile trick, foolish more than vile,
"Should have been counted sin, I make it so
"At any rate no more of it for me—
"Nay, for I break the torture-engine thus!"
Then did Religion start up, stare amain,
Look round for help and see none, smile and say
"What, broken is the rack? Well done of thee!
"Did I forget to abrogate its use?
"Be the mistake in common with us both!
"—One more fault our blind age shall answer for,
"Down in my book denounced though it must be
"Somewhere Henceforth find truth by milder means!"
Ah but, Religion, did we wait for thee
To ope the book, that serves to sit upon,
And pick such place out, we should wait indeed!
That is all history and what is not now,
Was then, defendants found it to their cost
How Guido, after being tortured, spoke

Also hear Caponsacchi who comes next,
Man and priest—could you comprehend the coil!—
In days when that was rife which now is rare
How, mingling each its multifarious wires,
Now heaven, now earth, now heaven and earth at once,
Had plucked at and perplexed their puppet here,

Played off the young frank personable priest,
Sworn fast and tonsured plain heaven's celibate,
And yet earth's clear-accepted servitor,
A courtly spiritual Cupid, squire of dames
By law of love and mandate of the mode
The Church's own, or why parade her seal,
Wherefore that chrism and consecrative work?
Yet verily the world's, or why go badged
A prince of sonneteers and lutanists,
Show colour of each vanity in vogue
Borne with decorum due on blameless breast?
All that is changed now, as he tells the court
How he had played the part excepted at,
Tells it, moreover, now the second time
Since, for his cause of scandal, his own share
I' the flight from home and husband of the wife,
He has been censured, punished in a sort
By relegation,—exile, we should say,
To a short distance for a little time,—
Whence he is summoned on a sudden now,
Informed that she, he thought to save, is lost,
And, in a breath, bidden re-tell his tale,
Since the first telling somehow missed effect,
And then advise in the matter There stands he,
While the same grim black-panelled chamber blinks
As though rubbed shiny with the sins of Rome

Told the same tale for ages—wave-washed wall
Against which sets a sea of wickedness
There, where you yesterday heard Guido speak,
Speaks Caponsacchi, and there face him too
Tommati, Venturini and the rest
Who, eight months earlier, scarce repressed the smile,
Forewent the wink, waived recognition so
Of peccadillos incident to youth,
Especially youth high-born, for youth means love,
Vows can't change nature, priests are only men,
And love likes stratagem and subterfuge
Which age, that once was youth, should recognize,
May blame, but needs not press too hard upon
Here sit the old Judges then, but with no grace
Of reverend carriage, magisterial port
For why? The accused of eight months since,—the same
Who cut the conscious figure of a fool,
Changed countenance, dropped bashful gaze to ground,
While hesitating for an answer then,—
Now is grown judge himself, terrifies now
This, now the other culprit called a judge,
Whose turn it is to stammer and look strange,
As he speaks rapidly, angrily, speech that smites
And they keep silence, bear blow after blow,

Because the seeming-solitary man,
Speaking for God, may have an audience too,
Invisible, no discreet judge provokes
How the priest Caponsacchi said his say

Then a soul sighs its lowest and its last
After the loud ones,—so much breath remains
Unused by the four-days'-dying, for she lived
Thus long, miraculously long, 't was thought,
Just that Pompilia might defend herself
How, while the hireling and the alien stoop,
Comfort, yet question,—since the time is brief,
And folk, allowably inquisitive,
Encircle the low pallet where she lies
In the good house that helps the poor to die,—
Pompilia tells the story of her life
For friend and lover,—leech and man of law
Do service, busy helpful ministrants
As varied in their calling as their mind,
Temper and age and yet from all of these,
About the white bed under the arched roof,
Is somehow, as it were, evolved a one,—
Small separate sympathies combined and large,
Nothings that were, grown something very much
As if the bystanders gave each his straw,
All he had, though a trifle in itself,

Which, plaited all together, made a Cross
Fit to die looking on and praying with,
Just as well as if ivory or gold
So, to the common kindliness she speaks,
There being scarce more privacy at the last
For mind than body but she is used to bear,
And only unused to the brotherly look
How she endeavoured to explain her life

Then, since a Trial ensued, a touch o' the same
To sober us, flustered with frothy talk,
And teach our common sense its helplessness
For why deal simply with divining-rod,
Scrape where we fancy secret sources flow,
And ignore law, the recognized machine,
Elaborate display of pipe and wheel
Framed to unchoke, pump up and pour apace
Truth till a flowery foam shall wash the world?
The patent truth-extracting process,—ha?
Let us make that grave mystery turn one wheel,
Give you a single grind of law at least!
One orator, of two on either side,
Shall teach us the puissance of the tongue
—That is, o' the pen which simulated tongue
On paper and saved all except the sound
Which never was Law's speech beside law's thought?

That were too stunning, too immense an odds
That point of vantage law lets nobly pass
One lawyer shall admit us to behold
The manner of the making out a case,
First fashion of a speech, the chick in egg,
The masterpiece law's bosom incubates
How Don Giacinto of the Arcangeli,
Called Procurator of the Poor at Rome,
Now advocate for Guido and his mates,—
The jolly learned man of middle age,
Cheek and jowl all in laps with fat and law,
Mirthful as mighty, yet, as great hearts use,
Despite the name and fame that tempt our flesh,
Constant to that devotion of the hearth,
Still captive in those dear domestic ties!—
How he,—having a cause to triumph with,
All kind of interests to keep intact,
More than one efficacious personage
To tranquillize, conciliate and secure,
And above all, public anxiety
To quiet, show its Guido in good hands,—
Also, as if such burdens were too light,
A certain family-feast to claim his care,
The birthday-banquet for the only son—
Paternity at smiling strife with law—
How he brings both to buckle in one bond,

And, thick at throat, with waterish under-eye,
Turns to his task and settles in his seat
And puts his utmost means in practice now
Wheezes out law-phrase, whiffles Latin forth,
And, just as though roast lamb would never be,
Makes logic levigate the big crime small
Rubs palm on palm, rakes foot with itchy foot,
Conceives and inchoates the argument,
Sprinkling each flower appropriate to the time,
—Ovidian quip or Ciceronian crank,
A-bubble in the larynx while he laughs,
As he had fritters deep down frying there
How he turns, twists, and tries the oily thing
Shall be—first speech for Guido 'gainst the Fisc
Then with a skip as it were from heel to head,
Leaving yourselves fill up the middle bulk
O' the Trial, reconstruct its shape august,
From such exordium clap we to the close,
Give you, if we dare wing to such a height,
The absolute glory in some full-grown speech
On the other side, some finished butterfly,
Some breathing diamond-flake with leaf-gold fans,
That takes the air, no trace of worm it was,
Or cabbage-bed it had production from
Giovambattista o' the Bottini, Fisc,
Pompilia's patron by the chance of the hour,

To-morrow her persecutor,—composite he,
As becomes who must meet such various calls—
Odds of age joined in him with ends of youth
A man of ready smile and facile tear,
Improvised hopes, despairs at nod and beck,
And language—ah, the gift of eloquence!
Language that goes, goes, easy as a glove,
O'er good and evil, smoothens both to one
Rashness helps caution with him, fires the straw,
In free enthusiastic careless fit,
On the first proper pinnacle of rock
Which offers, as reward for all that zeal,
To lure some bark to founder and bring gain
While calm sits Caution, rapt with heavenward eye,
A true confessor's gaze, amid the glare
Beaconing to the breaker, death and hell
"Well done, thou good and faithful" she approves
"Hadst thou let slip a faggot to the beach,
"The crew might surely spy thy precipice
"And save their boat, the simple and the slow
"Might so, forsooth, forestall the wrecker's fee!
"Let the next crew be wise and hail in time!"
Just so compounded is the outside man,
Blue juvenile pure eye and pippin cheek,
And brow all prematurely soiled and seamed
With sudden age, bright devastated hair

Ah, but you miss the very tones o' the voice,
The scrannel pipe that screams in heights of head,
As, in his modest studio, all alone,
The tall wight stands a-tiptoe, strives and strains,
Both eyes shut, like the cockerel that would crow,
Tries to his own self amorously o'er
What never will be uttered else than so—
Since to the four walls, Forum and Mars' Hill,
Speaks out the poesy which, penned, turns prose
Clavecinist debarred his instrument,
He yet thrums—shirking neither turn nor trill,
With desperate finger on dumb table edge—
The sovereign rondo, shall conclude his *Suite*,
Charm an imaginary audience there,
From old Corelli to young Haendel, both
I' the flesh at Rome, ere he perforce go print
The cold black score, mere music for the mind—
The last speech against Guido and his gang,
With special end to prove Pompilia pure
How the Fisc vindicates Pompilia's fame

Then comes the all but end, the ultimate
Judgment save yours Pope Innocent the Twelfth,
Simple, sagacious, mild yet resolute,
With prudence, probity and—what beside
From the other world he feels impress at times,

Having attained to fourscore years and six,—
How, when the court found Guido and the rest
Guilty, but law supplied a subterfuge
And passed the final sentence to the Pope,
He, bringing his intelligence to bear
This last time on what ball behoves him drop
In the urn, or white or black, does drop a black,
Send five souls more to just precede his own,
Stand him in stead and witness, if need were,
How he is wont to do God's work on earth
The manner of his sitting out the dim
Droop of a sombre February day
In the plain closet where he does such work,
With, from all Peter's treasury, one stool,
One table and one lathen crucifix
There sits the Pope, his thoughts for company,
Grave but not sad,—nay, something like a cheer
Leaves the lips free to be benevolent,
Which, all day long, did duty firm and fast
A cherishing there is of foot and knee,
A chafing loose-skinned large-veined hand with hand,—
What steward but knows when stewardship earns its wage,
May levy praise, anticipate the lord?
He reads, notes, lays the papers down at last,
Muses, then takes a turn about the room,

Unclasps a huge tome in an antique guise,
Primitive print and tongue half obsolete,
That stands him in diurnal stead, opes page,
Finds place where falls the passage to be conned
According to an order long in use
And, as he comes upon the evening's chance,
Starts somewhat, solemnizes straight his smile,
Then reads aloud that portion first to last,
And at the end lets flow his own thoughts forth
Likewise aloud, for respite and relief,
Till by the dreary relics of the west
Wan through the half-moon window, all his light,
He bows the head while the lips move in prayer,
Writes some three brief lines, signs and seals the same,
Tinkles a hand-bell, bids the obsequious Sir
Who puts foot presently o' the closet-sill
He watched outside of, bear as superscribed
That mandate to the Governor forthwith
Then heaves abroad his cares in one good sigh,
Traverses corridor with no arm's help,
And so to sup as a clear conscience should
The manner of the judgment of the Pope

Then must speak Guido yet a second time,
Satan's old saw being apt here—skin for skin,
All a man hath that will he give for life

While life was graspable and gainable,
And bird-like buzzed her wings round Guido's brow,
Not much truth stiffened out the web of words
He wove to catch her when away she flew
And death came, death's breath rivelled up the lies,
Left bare the metal thread, the fibre fine
Of truth, i' the spinning the true words shone last
How Guido, to another purpose quite,
Speaks and despairs, the last night of his life,
In that New Prison by Castle Angelo
At the bridge foot the same man, another voice
On a stone bench in a close fetid cell,
Where the hot vapour of an agony,
Struck into drops on the cold wall, runs down—
Horrible worms made out of sweat and tears—
There crouch, well nigh to the knees in dungeon-straw,
Lit by the sole lamp suffered for their sake,
Two awe-struck figures, this a Cardinal,
That an Abate, both of old styled friends
O' the thing part man part monster in the midst,
So changed is Franceschini's gentle blood
The tiger-cat screams now, that whined before,
That pried and tried and trod so gingerly,
Till in its silkiness the trap-teeth joined,
Then you know how the bristling fury foams
They listen, this wrapped in his folds of red,

While his feet fumble for the filth below,
The other, as beseems a stouter heart,
Working his best with beads and cross to ban
The enemy that comes in like a flood
Spite of the standard set up, verily
And in no trope at all, against him there
For at the prison-gate, just a few steps
Outside, already, in the doubtful dawn,
Thither, from this side and from that, slow sweep
And settle down in silence solidly,
Crow-wise, the frightful Brotherhood of Death
Black-hatted and black-hooded huddle they,
Black rosaries a-dangling from each waist,
So take they their grim station at the door,
Torches lit, skull-and-cross bones-banner spread,
And that gigantic Christ with open arms,
Grounded Nor lacks there aught but that the group
Break forth, intone the lamentable psalm,
"Out of the deeps, Lord, have I cried to thee!"—
When inside, from the true profound, a sign
Shall bear intelligence that the foe is foiled,
Count Guido Franceschini has confessed,
And is absolved and reconciled with God
Then they, intoning, may begin their march,
Make by the longest way for the People's Square,
Carry the criminal to his crime's award

A mob to cleave, a scaffolding to reach,
Two gallows and Mannaia crowning all
How Guido made defence a second time

Finally, even as thus by step and step
I led you from the level of to day
Up to the summit of so long ago,
Here, whence I point you the wide prospect round—
Let me, by like steps, slope you back to smooth,
Land you on mother-earth, no whit the worse,
To feed o' the fat o' the furrow free to dwell,
Taste our time's better things profusely spread
For all who love the level, corn and wine,
Much cattle and the many-folded fleece
Shall not my friends go feast again on sward,
Though cognizant of country in the clouds
Higher than wistful eagle's horny eye
Ever unclosed for, 'mid ancestral crags,
When morning broke and Spring was back once more,
And he died, heaven, save by his heart, unreached?
Yet heaven my fancy lifts to, ladder-like,—
As Jack reached, holpen of his beanstalk-rungs!

A novel country I might make it mine
By choosing which one aspect of the year
Suited mood best, and putting solely that

On panel somewhere in the House of Fame,
Landscaping what I saved, not what I saw
—Might fix you, whether frost in goblin-time
Startled the moon with his abrupt bright laugh,
Or, August's hair afloat in filmy fire,
She fell, arms wide, face foremost on the world,
Swooned there and so singed out the strength of things
Thus were abolished Spring and Autumn both,
The land dwarfed to one likeness of the land,
Life cramped corpse-fashion Rather learn and love
Each facet flash of the revolving year!—
Red, green and blue that whirl into a white,
The variance now, the eventual unity,
Which make the miracle See it for yourselves,
This man's act, changeable because alive!
Action now shrouds, nor shows the informing thought,
Man, like a glass ball with a spark a top,
Out of the magic fire that lurks inside,
Shows one tint at a time to take the eye
Which, let a finger touch the silent sleep,
Shifted a hair's-breadth shoots you dark for bright,
Suffuses bright with dark, and baffles so
Your sentence absolute for shine or shade
Once set such orbs,—white styled, black stigmatized,—
A-rolling, see them once on the other side
Your good men and your bad men every one

From Guido Franceschini to Guy Faux,
Oft would you rub your eyes and change your names

Such, British Public, ye who like me not,
(God love you!)—whom I yet have laboured for,
Perchance more careful whoso runs may read
Than erst when all, it seemed, could read who ran,—
Perchance more careless whoso reads may praise
Than late when he who praised and read and wrote
Was apt to find himself the self-same me,—
Such labour had such issue, so I wrought
This arc, by furtherance of such alloy,
And so, by one spirt, take away its trace
Till, justifiably golden, rounds my ring

A ring without a posy, and that ring mine?

O lyric Love, half angel and half bird
And all a wonder and a wild desire,—
Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,
Took sanctuary within the holier blue,
And sang a kindred soul out to his face,—
Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart—
When the first summons from the darkling earth
Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their blue,
And bared them of the glory—to drop down,

To toil for man, to suffer or to die,—
This is the same voice: can thy soul know change?
Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help!
Never may I commence my song, my due
To God who best taught song by gift of thee,
Except with bent head and beseeching hand—
That still, despite the distance and the dark,
What was, again may be; some interchange
Of grace, some splendour once thy very thought,
Some benediction anciently thy smile:
—Never conclude, but raising hand and head
Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn
For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,
Their utmost up and on,—so blessing back
In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,
Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall!

II

HALF-ROME

WHAT, you, Sir, come too? (Just the man I 'd meet)
Be ruled by me and have a care o' the crowd
This way, while fresh folk go and get their gaze
I 'll tell you like a book and save your shins
Fie, what a roaring day we 've had! Whose fault?
Lorenzo in Lucina,—here 's a church
To hold a crowd at need, accommodate
All comers from the Corso! If this crush
Make not its priests ashamed of what they show
For temple-room, don't prick them to draw purse
And down with bricks and mortar, eke us out
The beggarly transept with its bit of apse
Into a decent space for Christian ease,
Why, to-day's lucky pearl is cast to swine
Listen and estimate the luck they 've had!
(The right man, and I hold him)
Sir, do you see,
They laid both bodies in the church, this morn

The first thing, on the chancel two steps up,
Behind the little marble balustrade,
Disposed them, Pietro the old murdered fool
To the right of the altar, and his wretched wife
On the other side In trying to count stabs,
People supposed Violante showed the most,
Till somebody explained us that mistake,
His wounds had been dealt out indifferent where,
But she took all her stabbings in the face,
Since punished thus solely for honour's sake,
Honoris causâ, that 's the proper term
A delicacy there is, our gallants hold,
When you avenge your honour and only then,
That you disfigure the subject, fray the face,
Not just take life and end, in clownish guise
It was Violante gave the first offence,
Got therefore the conspicuous punishment
While Pietro, who helped merely, his mere death
Answered the purpose, so his face went free
We fancied even, free as you please, that face
Showed itself still intolerably wronged,
Was wrinkled over with resentment yet,
Nor calm at all, as murdered faces use,
Once the worst ended an indignant air
O' the head there was—'t is said the body turned
Round and away, rolled from Violante's side

Where they had laid it loving-husband-like
If so, if corpses can be sensitive,
Why did not he roll right down altar-step,
Roll on through nave, roll fairly out of church,
Deprive Lorenzo of the spectacle,
Pay back thus the succession of affronts
Whereto this church had served as theatre?
For see at that same altar where he lies,
To that same inch of step, was brought the babe
For blessing after baptism, and there styled
Pompilia, and a string of names beside,
By his bad wife, some seventeen years ago,
Who purchased her simply to palm on him,
Flatter his dotage and defraud the heirs
Wait awhile! Also to this very step
Did this Violante, twelve years afterward,
Bring, the mock-mother, that child cheat full-grown,
Pompilia, in pursuance of her plot,
And there brave God and man a second time
By linking a new victim to the lie
There, having made a match unknown to him,
She, still unknown to Pietro, tied the knot
Which nothing cuts except this kind of knife,
Yes, made her daughter, as the girl was held,
Marry a man, and honest man beside,
And man of birth to boot,—clandestinely

Because of this, because of that, because
O' the devil's will to work his worst for once,—
Confident she could top her part at need
And, when her husband must be told in turn,
Ply the wife's trade, play off the sex's trick
And, alternating worry with quiet qualms,
Bravado with submissiveness, prettily fool
Her Pietro into patience so it proved
Ay, 't is four years since man and wife they grew,
This Guido Franceschini and this same
Pompilia, foolishly thought, falsely declared
A Comparini and the couple's child
Just at this altar where, beneath the piece
Of Master Guido Reni, Christ on cross,
Second to nought observable in Rome,
That couple lie now, murdered yestereve
Even the blind can see a providence here

From dawn till now that it is growing dusk
A multitude has flocked and filled the church,
Coming and going, coming back again,
Till to count crazed one Rome was at the show
People climbed up the columns, fought for spikes
O' the chapel rail to perch themselves upon,
Jumped over and so broke the wooden work
Painted like porphyry to deceive the eye,—

Serve the priests right! The organ-loft was crammed,
Women were fainting, no few fights ensued,
In short, it was a show repaid your pains
For, though their room was scant undoubtedly,
Yet they did manage matters, to be just,
A little at this Lorenzo Body o' me!
I saw a body exposed once . never mind!
Enough that here the bodies had their due
No stinginess in wax, a row all round,
And one big taper at each head and foot

So, people pushed their way, and took their turn,
Saw, threw their eyes up, crossed themselves, gave place
To pressure from behind, since all the world
Knew the old pair, could talk the tragedy
Over from first to last Pompilia too,
Those who had known her—what 't was worth to them!
Guido's acquaintance was in less request,
The Count had lounged somewhat too long in Rome,
Made himself cheap, with him were hand and glove
Barbers and blear-eyed, as the ancient sings
Also he is alive and like to be
Had he considerately died,—aha!
I jostled Luca Cini on his staff,
Mute in the midst, the whole man one amaze,
Staring amain and crossing brow and breast

" How now?" asked I "'T is seventy years, quoth he,
" Since I first saw, holding my father's hand,
" Bodies set forth a many have I seen,
" Yet all was poor to this I live and see
" Here the world's wickedness seals up the sum
" What with Molinos' doctrine and this deed,
" Antichrist surely comes and doomsday's near
" May I depart in peace, I have seen my see"
" Depart then," I advised, "nor block the road
" For youngsters still behindhand with such sights!"
Why no," rejoins the venerable sire,
" I know it 's horrid, hideous past belief,
" Burdensome far beyond what eye can bear,
" But they do promise, when Pompilia dies
" I' the course o' the day,— and she can't outlive night,—
" They 'll bring her body also to expose
" Beside the parents, one, two, three a breast,
" That were indeed a sight, which might I see,
" I trust I should not last to see the like!"
Whereat I bade the senior spare his shanks,
Since doctors give her till to-night to live,
And tell us how the butchery happened "Ah,
" But you can't know!" sighs he, "I 'll not despair
" Beside I 'm useful at explaining things—
" As, how the dagger laid there at the feet,
" Caused the peculiar cuts, I mind its make,

" Triangular i' the blade, a Genoese,
" Armed with those little hook teeth on the edge
" To open in the flesh nor shut again
" I like to teach a novice I shall stay!"
And stay he did, and stay be sure he will

A personage came by the private door
At noon to have his look I name no names
Well then, His Eminence the Cardinal,
Whose servitor in honourable sort
Guido was once, the same who made the match,
(Will you have the truth?) whereof we see effect
No sooner whisper ran he was arrived
Than up pops Curate Carlo, a brisk lad,
Who never lets a good occasion slip,
And volunteers improving the event
We looked he 'd give the history's self some help,
Treat us to how the wife's confession went
(This morning she confessed her crime, we know)
And, may-be, throw in something of the Priest—
If he 's not ordered back, punished anew,
The gallant, Caponsacchi, Lucifer
I' the garden where Pompilia, Eve-like, lured
Her Adam Guido to his fault and fall
Think you we got a sprig of speech akin
To this from Carlo, with the Cardinal there?

Too wary he was, too widely awake, I trow
He did the murder in a dozen words,
Then said that all such outrages crop forth
I' the course of nature when Molinos' tares
Are sown for wheat, flourish and choke the Church
So slid on to the abominable sect
And the philosophic sin—we 've heard all that,
And the Cardinal too, (who book-made on the same)
But, for the murder, left it where he found
Oh but he 's quick, the Curate, minds his game!
And, after all, we have the main o' the fact
Case could not well be simpler,—mapped, as it were,
We follow the murder's maze from source to sea,
By the red line, past mistake one sees indeed
Not only how all was and must have been,
But cannot other than be to the end of time
Turn out here by the Ruspoli! Do you hold
Guido was so prodigiously to blame?
A certain cousin of yours has told you so?
Exactly! Here 's a friend shall set you right,
Let him but have the handsel of your ear

These wretched Comparini were once gay
And galliard, of the modest middle class
Born in this quarter seventy years ago
And married young, they lived the accustomed life,

Citizens as they were of good repute
And, childless, naturally took their ease
With only their two selves to care about
And use the wealth for wealthy is the word,
Since Pietro was possessed of house and land—
And specially one house, when good days smiled,
In Via Vittoria, the aspectable street
Where he lived mainly, but another house
Of less pretension did he buy betimes,
The villa, meant for jaunts and jollity,
I' the Pauline district, to be private there—
Just what puts murder in an enemy's head
Moreover,—here 's the worm i' the core, the germ
O' the rottenness and ruin which arrived,—
He owned some usufruct, had moneys' use
Lifelong, but to determine with his life
In heirs' default so, Pietro craved an heir,
(The story always old and always new)
Shut his fool's eyes fast on the visible good
And wealth for certain, opened them owl-wide
On fortune's sole piece of forgetfulness,
The child that should have been and would not be

Hence, seventeen years ago, conceive his glee
When first Violante, 'twixt a smile and blush,
With touch of agitation proper too,

Announced that, spite of her unpromising age,
The miracle would in time be manifest,
An heir's birth was to happen and it did
Somehow or other,—how, all in good time!
By a trick, a sleight of hand you are to hear,—
A child was born, Pompilia, for his joy,
Plaything at once and prop, a fairy-gift,
A saints' grace or, say, grant of the good God,—
A fiddle-pin's end! What imbeciles are we!
Look now if some one could have prophesied,
'For love of you, for liking to your wife,
"I undertake to crush a snake I spy
"Settling itself i' the soft of both your breasts
"Give me yon babe to strangle painlessly!
"She 'll soar to the safe you 'll have your crying out,
"Then sleep, then wake, then sleep, then end your days
"In peace and plenty, mixed with mild regret,
"Thirty years hence when Christmas takes old folk"—
How had old Pietro sprung up, crossed himself,
And kicked the conjuror! Whereas you and I,
Being wise with after-wit, had clapped our hands,
Nay, added, in the old fool's interest,
"Strangle the black eyed babe, so far so good,
"But on condition you relieve the man

"O' the wife and throttle him Violante too—
"She is the mischief!"

We had hit the mark
She, whose trick brought the babe into the world,
She it was, when the babe was grown a girl,
Judged a new trick should reinforce the old,
Send vigour to the lie now somewhat spent
By twelve years' service, lest Eve's rule decline
Over this Adam of hers, whose cabbage-plot
Throve dubiously since turned fools' paradise,
Spite of a nightingale on every stump
Pietro's estate was dwindling day by day,
While he, rapt far above such mundane care,
Crawled all fours with his baby pick-a-back,
Sat at serene cats'-cradle with his child,
Or took the measured tallness, top to toe,
Of what was grown a great girl twelve years old
Till sudden at the door a tap discreet,
A visitor's premonitory cough,
And poverty had reached him in her rounds

This came when he was past the working-time,
Had learned to dandle and forgot to dig,
And who must but Violante cast about,
Contrive and task that head of hers again?

She who had caught one fish, could make that catch
A bigger still, in angler's policy
So, with an angler's mercy for the bait,
Her minnow was set wriggling on its barb
And tossed to mid-stream, which means, this grown girl
With the great eyes and bounty of black hair
And first crisp youth that tempts a jaded taste,
Was whisked i' the way of a certain man, who snapped

Count Guido Franceschini the Aretine
Was head of an old noble house enough,
Not over-rich, you can't have everything,
But such a man as riches rub against,
Readily stick to,—one with a right to them
Born in the blood 't was in his very brow
Always to knit itself against the world,
Beforehand so, when that world stinted due
Service and suit the world ducks and defers
As such folks do, he had come up to Rome
To better his fortune, and, since many years,
Was friend and follower of a cardinal,
Waiting the rather thus on providence
That a shrewd younger poorer brother yet,
The Abate Paolo, a regular priest,
Had long since tried his powers and found he swam
With the deftest on the Galilean pool

But then he was a web-foot, free o' the wave,
And no ambiguous dab-chick hatched to strut,
Humbled by any fond attempt to swim
When fiercer fowl usurped his dunghill top—
A whole priest, Paolo, no mere piece of one
Like Guido tacked thus to the Church's tail!
Guido moreover, as the head o' the house,
Claiming the main prize, not the lesser luck,
The centre lily, no mere chickweed fringe

He waited and learned waiting, thirty years,
Got promise, missed performance—what would you have?
No petty post rewards a nobleman
For spending youth in splendid lackey-work,
And there 's concurrence for each rarer prize,
When that falls rougher hand and readier foot
Push aside Guido spite of his black looks
The end was, Guido, when the warning showed,
The first white hair i' the glass, gave up the game,
Determined on returning to his town,
Making the best of bad incurable,
Patching the old palace up and lingering there
The customary life out with his kin,
Where honour helps to spice the scanty bread

Just as he trimmed his lamp and girt his loins

To go his journey and be wise at home,
In the right mood of disappointed worth,
Who but Violante sudden spied her prey
(Where was I with that angler-simile?)
And threw her bait, Pompilia, where he sulked—
A gleam i' the gloom!

What if he gained thus much,
Wrung out this sweet drop from the bitter Past,
Bore off this rose bud from the prickly brake
To justify such torn clothes and scratched hands,
And, after all, brought something back from Rome?
Would not a wife serve at Arezzo well
To light the dark house, lend a look of youth
To the mother's face grown meagre, left alone
And famished with the emptiness of hope,
Old Donna Beatrice? Wife you want
Would you play family-representative,
Carry you elder-brotherly, high and right
O'er what may prove the natural petulance
Of the third brother, younger, greedier still,
Girolamo, also a fledgeling priest,
Beginning life in turn with callow beak
Agape for luck, no luck had stopped and stilled
Such were the pinks and greys about the bait
Persuaded Guido gulp down hook and all

What constituted him so choice a catch,
You question? Past his prime and poor beside!
Ask that of any she who knows the trade
Why first, here was a nobleman with friends,
A palace one might run to and be safe
When presently the threatened fate should fall,
A big-browed master to block door-way up,
Parley with people bent on pushing by
And praying the mild Pietro quick clear scores
Is birth a privilege and power or no?
Also,—but judge of the result desired,
By the price paid and manner of the sale
The Count was made woo, win and wed at once
Asked, and was haled for answer, lest the heat
Should cool, to San Lorenzo, one blind eve,
And had Pompilia put into his arms
O' the sly there, by a hasty candle-blink,
With sanction of some priest-confederate
Properly paid to make short work and sure

So did old Pietro's daughter change her style
For Guido Franceschini's lady-wife
Ere Guido knew it well, and why this haste
And scramble and indecent secrecy?
"Lest Pietro, all the while in ignorance,
"Should get to learn, gainsay and break the match

"His peevishness had promptly put aside
"Such honour and refused the proffered boon
"Pleased to become authoritative once.
"She remedied the wilful man's mistake—"
Did our discreet Violante Rather say,
Thus did she, lest the object of her game,
Guido the gulled one, give him but a chance,
A moment's respite, time for thinking twice,
Might count the cost before he sold himself,
And try the clink of coin they paid him with

But coin paid, bargain struck and business done,
Once the clandestine marriage over thus,
All parties made perforce the best o' the fact,
Pietro could play vast indignation off,
Be ignorant and astounded, dupe, poor soul,
Please you, of daughter, wife and son-in-law,
While Guido found himself in flagrant fault,
Must e'en do suit and service, soothe, subdue
A father not unreasonably chafed,
Bring him to terms by paying son's devoir
Pleasant initiation!

The end, this
Guido's broad back was saddled to bear all—
Pietro, Violante, and Pompilia too,—

Three lots cast confidently in one lap,
Three dead-weights with one arm to lift the three
Out of their limbo up to life again
The Roman household was to strike fresh root
In a new soil, graced with a novel name,
Gilt with an alien glory, Aretine
Henceforth and never Roman any more,
By treaty and engagement, thus it ran
Pompilia's dowry for Pompilia's self
As a thing of course,—she paid her own expense,
No loss nor gain there but the couple, you see,
They, for their part, turned over first of all
Their fortune in its rags and rottenness
To Guido, fusion and confusion, he
And his with them and theirs,—whatever rag
With coin sciduary fell on floor
When Brother Paolo's energetic shake
Should do the relics justice since 't was thought,
Once vulnerable Pietro out of reach,
That, left at Rome as representative,
The Abate, backed by a potent patron here,
And otherwise with purple flushing him,
Might play a good game with the creditor,
Make up a moiety which, great or small,
Should go to the common stock—if anything,
Guido's, so far repayment of the cost

About to be,—and if, as looked more like,
Nothing,—why, all the nobler cost were his
Who guaranteed, for better or for worse,
To Pietro and Violante, house and home,
Kith and kin, with the pick of company
And life o' the fat o' the land while life should last
How say you to the bargain at first blush?
Why did a middle-aged not-silly man
Show himself thus besotted all at once?
Quoth Solomon, one black eye does it all

They went to Arezzo,—Pietro and his spouse,
With just the dusk o' the day of life to spend,
Eager to use the twilight, taste a treat,
Enjoy for once with neither stay nor stint
The luxury of lord-and-lady-ship,
And realize the stuff and nonsense long
A-simmer in their noddles, vent the fume
Born there and bred, the citizen's conceit
How fares nobility while crossing earth,
What rampart or invisible body-guard
Keeps off the taint of common life from such
They had not fed for nothing on the tales
Of grandees who give banquets worthy Jove,
Spending gold as if Plutus paid a whim,
Served with obeisances as when what God?

I 'm at the end of my tether, 't is enough
You understand what they came primed to see
While Guido who should minister the sight,
Stay all this qualmish greediness of soul
With apples and with flagons—for his part,
Was set on life diverse as pole from pole
Lust of the flesh, lust of the eye,—what else
Was he just now awake from, sick and sage,
After the very debauch they would begin?—
Suppose such stuff and nonsense really were
That bubble, they were bent on blowing big,
He had blown already till he burst his cheeks,
And hence found soapsuds bitter to the tongue
He hoped now to walk softly all his days
In soberness of spirit, if haply so,
Pinching and paring he might furnish forth
A frugal board, bare sustenance, no more,
Till times, that could not well grow worse, should mend

Thus minded then, two parties mean to meet
And make each other happy The first week,
And fancy strikes fact and explodes in full
"This," shrieked the Comparini, "this the Count,
"The palace, the signorial privilege,
"The pomp and pageantry were promised us?
"For this have we exchanged our liberty,

"Our competence, our darling of a child?
"To house as spectres in a sepulchre
"Under this black stone-heap, the street's disgrace,
"Grimmest as that is of the gruesome town,
"And here pick garbage on a pewter plate
"Or cough at verjuice dripped from earthenware?
"Oh Via Vittoria, oh the other place
"I' the Pauline, did we give you up for this?
"Where 's the foregone housekeeping good and gay,
"The neighbourliness, the companionship,
"The treat and feast when holidays came round,
"The daily feast that seemed no treat at all,
"Called common by the uncommon fools we were!
"Even the sun that used to shine at Rome,
"Where is it? Robbed and starved and frozen too,
"We will have justice, justice if there be!"
Did not they shout, did not the town resound!
Guido's old lady-mother Beatrice,
Who since her husband, Count Tommaso's death,
Had held sole sway i' the house,—the doited crone
Slow to acknowledge, curtsey and abdicate,—
Was recognized of true novercal type,
Dragon and devil His brother Girolamo
Came next in order priest was he? The worse!
No way of winning him to leave his mumps
And help the laugh against old ancestry

And formal habits long since out of date,
Letting his youth be patterned on the mode
Approved of where Violante laid down law
Or did he brighten up by way of change,
Dispose himself for affability?
The malapert, too complaisant by half
To the alarmed young novice of a bride!
Let him go buzz, betake himself elsewhere
Nor singe his fly-wings in the candle-flame!

Four months' probation of this purgatory,
Dog-snap and cat-claw, curse and counterblast,
The devil's self were sick of his own din,
And Pietro, after trumpeting huge wrongs
At church and market-place, pillar and post,
Square's corner, street's end, now the palace-step
And now the wine-house bench—while, on her side,
Violante up and down was voluble
In whatsoever pair of ears would perk
From goody, gossip, cater-cousin and sib,
Curious to peep at the inside of things
And catch in the act pretentious poverty
At its wits' end to keep appearance up,
Make both ends meet,—nothing the vulgar loves
Like what this couple pitched them right and left
Then, their worst done that way, both struck tent, marched

—Renounced their share o' the bargain, flung what dues
Guido was bound to pay, in Guido's face,
Left their hearts'-darling, treasure of the twain
And so forth, the poor inexperienced bride,
To her own devices, bade Arezzo rot,
Cursed life signorial, and sought Rome once more

I see the comment ready on your lip,
"The better fortune, Guido's—free at least
"By this defection of the foolish pair,
"He could begin make profit in some sort
"Of the young bride and the new quietness,
"Lead his own life now, henceforth breathe unplagued"
Could he? You know the sex like Guido's self
Learn the Violante-nature!

Once in Rome,
By way of helping Guido lead such life,
Her first act to inaugurate return
Was, she got pricked in conscience Jubilee
Gave her the hint Our Pope, as kind as just,
Attained his eighty years, announced a boon
Should make us bless the fact, held Jubilee—
Short shrift, prompt pardon for the light offence,
And no rough dealing with the regular crime
So this occasion were not suffered slip—

Otherwise, sins commuted as before,
Without the least abatement in the price
Now, who had thought it? All this while, it seems,
Our sage Violante had a sin of a sort
She must compound for now or not at all
Now be the ready riddance! She confessed
Pompilia was a fable not a fact
She never bore a child in her whole life
Had this child been a changeling, that were grace
In some degree, exchange is hardly theft,
You take your stand on truth ere leap your lie
Here was all lie, no touch of truth at all,
All the lie hers—not even Pietro guessed
He was as childless still as twelve years since
The babe had been a find i' the filth-heap, Sir,
Catch from the kennel! There was found at Rome,
Down in the deepest of our social dregs,
A woman who professed the wanton's trade
Under the requisite thin coverture,
Communis meretrix and washer-wife
The creature thus conditioned found by chance
Motherhood like a jewel in the muck,
And straightway either trafficked with her prize
Or listened to the tempter and let be,—
Made pact abolishing her place and part
In womankind, beast-fellowship indeed

She sold this babe eight months before its birth
To our Violante, Pietro's honest spouse,
Well-famed and widely-instanced as that crown
To the husband, virtue in a woman's shape
She it was, bought, paid for, passed off the thing
As very flesh and blood and child of her
Despite the flagrant fifty years,— and why?
Partly to please old Pietro, fill his cup
With wine at the late hour when lees are left,
And send him from life's feast rejoicingly,—
Partly to cheat the rightful heirs, agape,
Each uncle's cousin's brother's son of him,
For that same principal of the usufruct
It vext him he must die and leave behind

Such was the sin had come to be confessed
Which of the tales, the first or last, was true?
Did she so sin once, or, confessing now,
Sin for the first time? Either way you will
One sees a reason for the cheat one sees
A reason for a cheat in owning cheat
Where no cheat had been What of the revenge?
What prompted the contrition all at once,
Made the avowal easy, the shame slight?
Why, prove they but Pompilia not their child,
No child, no dowry! this, supposed their child,

Had claimed what this, shown alien to their blood,
Claimed nowise Guido's claim was through his wife,
Null then and void with hers The biter bit,
Do you see! For such repayment of the past,
One might conceive the penitential pair
Ready to bring their case before the courts,
Publish their infamy to all the world
And, arm in arm, go chuckling thence content

Is this your view? 'T was Guido's anyhow
And colourable he came forward then,
Protested in his very bride's behalf
Against this lie and all it led to, least
Of all the loss o' the dowry, no! From her
And him alike he would expunge the blot,
Erase the brand of such a bestial birth,
Participate in no hideous heritage
Gathered from the gutter to be garnered up
And glorified in a palace Peter and Paul!
But that who likes may look upon the pair
Exposed in yonder church, and show his skill
By saying which is eye and which is mouth
Thro' those stabs thick and threefold,—but for that—
A strong word on the liars and their lie
Might crave expression and obtain it, Sir!
—Though prematurely, since there 's more to come,

More that will shake your confidence in things
Your cousin tells you,—may I be so bold?

This makes the first act of the farce,—anon
The sombre element comes stealing in
Till all is black or blood red in the piece
Guido thus made a laughing stock abroad,
A proverb for the market place at home,
Left alone with Pompilia now, this graft
So reputable on his ancient stock,
This plague-seed set to fester his sound flesh,
What does the Count? Revenge him on his wife?
Unfasten at all risks to rid himself
The noisome lazar-badge, fall foul of fate,
And, careless whether the poor rag was'ware
O' the part it played, or helped unwittingly,
Bid it go burn and leave his frayed flesh free?
Plainly, did Guido open both doors wide,
Spurn thence the cur-cast creature and clear scores
As man might, tempted in extreme like this?
No, birth and breeding, and compassion too
Saved her such scandal She was young, he thought,
Not privy to the treason, punished most
I' the proclamation of it, why make her
A party to the crime she suffered by?
Then the black eyes were now her very own,

Not any more Violante's let her live,
Lose in a new air, under a new sun,
The taint of the imputed parentage
Truly or falsely, take no more the touch
Of Pietro and his partner anyhow!
All might go well yet

So she thought, herself,
It seems, since what was her first act and deed
When news came how these kindly ones at Rome
Had stripped her naked to amuse the world
With spots here, spots there and spots everywhere?
—For I should tell you that they noised abroad
Not merely the main scandal of her birth,
But slanders written, printed, published wide,
Pamphlets which set forth all the pleasantry
Of how the promised glory was a dream,
The power a bubble, and the wealth—why, dust
There was a picture, painted to the life,
Of those rare doings, that superlative
Initiation in magnificence
Conferred on a poor Roman family
By favour of Arezzo and her first
And famousest, the Franceschini there
You had the Countship holding head aloft
Bravely although bespattered, shifts and straits

In keeping out o' the way o' the wheels o' the world,
The comic of those home-contrivances
When the old lady mother's wit was taxed
To find six clamorous mouths in food more real
Than fruit plucked off the cobwebbed family-tree,
Or acorns shed from its gilt mouldered frame—
Cold glories served up with stale fame for sauce
What, I ask,—when the drunkenness of hate
Hiccuped return for hospitality,
Befouled the table they had feasted on,
Or say,—God knows I 'll not prejudge the case,—
Grievances thus distorted, magnified,
Coloured by quarrel into calumny,—
What side did our Pompilia first espouse?
Her first deliberate measure was—she wrote,
Pricked by some loyal impulse, straight to Rome
And her husband's brother the Abate there,
Who, having managed to effect the match,
Might take men's censure for its ill success
She made a clean breast also in her turn,
And qualified the couple properly,
Since whose departure, hell, she said, was heaven,
And the house, late distracted by their peals,
Quiet as Carmel where the lilies live
Herself had oftentimes complained but why?
All her complaints had been their prompting, tales

Trumped up, devices to this very end
Their game had been to thwart her husband's love
And cross his will, malign his words and ways,
To reach this issue, furnish this pretence
For impudent withdrawal from their bond,—
Theft, indeed murder, since they meant no less
Whose last injunction to her simple self
Had been—what parents'-precept do you think?
That she should follow after with all speed,
Fly from her husband's house clandestinely,
Join them at Rome again, but first of all
Pick up a fresh companion in her flight,
So putting youth and beauty to fit use,—
Some gay dare-devil cloak-and rapier spark
Capable of adventure,—helped by whom
She, some fine eve when lutes were in the air,
Having put poison in the posset cup,
Laid hands on money, jewels and the like,
And, to conceal the thing with more effect,
By way of parting benediction too,
Fired the house,—one would finish famously
I' the tumult, slip out, scurry off and away
And turn up merrily at home once more
Fact this, and not a dream o' the devil, Sir!
And more than this, a fact none dare dispute,
Word for word, such a letter did she write,

And such the Abate read, nor simply read
But gave all Rome to ruminate upon,
In answer to such charges as, I say,
The couple sought to be beforehand with

The cause thus carried to the courts at Rome,
Guido away, the Abate had no choice
But stand forth, take his absent brother's part,
Defend the honour of himself beside
He made what head he might against the pair,
Maintained Pompilia's birth legitimate
And all her rights intact—hers, Guido's now
And so far by his policy turned their flank,
(The enemy being beforehand in the place)
That,—though the courts allowed the cheat for fact,
Suffered Violante to parade her shame,
Publish her infamy to heart's content,
And let the tale o' the feigned birth pass for proved,—
Yet they stopped there, refused to intervene
And dispossess the innocents, befooled
By gifts o' the guilty, at guilt's new caprice
They would not take away the dowry now
Wrongfully given at first, nor bar at all
Succession to the aforesaid usufruct,
Established on a fraud, nor play the game
Of Pietro's child and now not Pietro's child

As it might suit the gamester's purpose Thus
Was justice ever ridiculed in Rome
Such be the double verdicts favoured here
Which send away both parties to a suit
Nor puffed up nor cast down,—for each a crumb
Of right, for neither of them the whole loaf
Whence, on the Comparini's part, appeal—
Counter appeal on Guido's,—that 's the game
And so the matter stands, even to this hour,
Bandied as balls are in a tennis-court,
And so might stand, unless some heart broke first,
Till doomsday

Leave it thus, and now revert
To the old Arezzo whence we moved to Rome
We 've had enough o' the parents, false or true,
Now for a touch o' the daughter's quality
The start 's fair henceforth, every obstacle
Out of the young wife's footpath, she 's alone,
Left to walk warily now how does she walk?
Why, once a dwelling's threshold marked and crossed
In rubric by the enemy on his rounds
As eligible, as fit place of prey,
Baffle him henceforth, keep him out who can!
Stop up the door at the first hint of hoof,
Presently at the window taps a horn,

And Satan 's by your fireside, never fear!
Pompilia, left alone now, found herself,
Found herself young too, sprightly, fair enough,
Matched with a husband old beyond his age
(Though that was something like four times her own)
Because of cares past, present and to come
Found too the house dull and its inmates dead,
So, looked outside for light and life
And love
Did in a trice turn up with life and light,—
The man with the aureole, sympathy made flesh,
The all-consoling Caponsacchi, Sir!
A priest—what else should the consoler be?
With goodly shoulderblade and proper leg,
A portly make and a symmetric shape,
And curls that clustered to the tonsure quite
This was a bishop in the bud, and now
A canon full-blown so far priest, and priest
Nowise exorbitantly overworked,
The courtly Christian, not so much Saint Paul
As a saint of Cæsar's household there posed he
Sending his god glance after his shot shaft,
Apollos turned Apollo, while the snake
Pompilia writhed transfixed through all her spires
He, not a visitor at Guido's house,
Scarce an acquaintance, but in prime request

With the magnates of Arezzo, was seen here,
Heard there, felt everywhere in Guido's path
If Guido's wife's path be her husband's too
Now he threw comfits at the theatre
Into her lap,—what harm in Carnival?
Now he pressed close till his foot touched her gown,
His hand brushed hers,—how help on promenade?
And, ever on weighty business, found his steps
Incline to a certain haunt of doubtful fame
Which fronted Guido's palace by mere chance,
While—how do accidents sometimes combine!—
Pompilia chose to cloister up her charms
Just in a chamber that o'erlooked the street,
Sat there to pray, or peep thence at mankind

This passage of arms and wits amused the town
At last the husband lifted eyebrow,—bent
On day-book and the study how to wring
Half the due vintage from the worn-out vines
At the villa, tease a quarter the old rent
From the farmstead, tenants swore would tumble soon,—
Pricked up his ear a-singing day and night
With "ruin, ruin,"—and so surprised at last—
Why, what else but a titter? Up he jumps
Back to mind come those scratchings at the grange,
Prints of the paw about the outhouse, rife

In his head at once again are word and wink,
Mum here and *budget* there, the smell o' the fox,
The musk o' the gallant "Friends, there 's falseness here!"

The proper help of friends in such a strait
Is waggery, the world over Laugh him free
O' the regular jealous fit that 's incident
To all old husbands that wed brisk young wives,
And he 'll go duly docile all his days
"Somebody courts your wife, Count? Where and when?
"How and why? Mere horn-madness have a care!
"Your lady loves her own room, sticks to it,
"Locks herself in for hours, you say yourself
"And—what, it 's Caponsacchi means you harm?
"The Canon? We caress him, he 's the world's,
"A man of such acceptance—never dream,
"Though he were fifty times the fox you fear,
"He 'd risk his brush for your particular chick,
"When the wide town 's his hen-roost! Fie o' the fool!"
So they dispensed their comfort of a kind
Guido at last cried "Something is in the air,
"Under the earth, some plot against my peace
"The trouble of eclipse hangs overhead,
"How it should come of that officious orb

"Your Canon in my system, you must say
"I say—that from the pressure of this spring
"Began the chime and interchange of bells,
"Ever one whisper, and one whisper more,
"And just one whisper for the silvery last,
"Till all at once a-row the bronze-throats burst
"Into a larum both significant
"And sinister stop it I must and will
"Let Caponsacchi take his hand away
"From the wire!—disport himself in other paths
"Than lead precisely to my palace-gate,—
"Look where he likes except one window's way
"Where, cheek on hand, and elbow set on sill,
"Happens to lean and say her litanies
"Every day and all day long, just my wife—
"Or wife and Caponsacchi may fare the worse!"

Admire the man's simplicity, "I 'll do this,
"I 'll not have that, I 'll punish and prevent!"—
'T is easy saying But to a fray, you see,
Two parties go The badger shows his teeth
The fox nor lies down sheep like nor dares fight
Oh, the wife knew the appropriate warfare well,
The way to put suspicion to the blush!
At first hint of remonstrance, up and out
I' the face of the world, you found her she could speak,

State her case,—Franceschini was a name,
Guido had his full share of foes and friends—
Why should not she call these to arbitrate?
She bade the Governor do governance,
Cried out on the Archbishop,—why, there now,
Take him for sample! Three successive times,
Had he to reconduct her by main force
From where she took her station opposite
His shut door,—on the public steps thereto,
Wringing her hands, when he came out to see,
And shrieking all her wrongs forth at his foot,—
Back to the husband and the house she fled
Judge if that husband warmed him in the face
Of friends or frowned on foes as heretofore!
Judge if he missed the natural grin of folk,
Or lacked the customary compliment
Of cap and bells, the luckless husband's fit!

So it went on and on till—who was right?
One merry April morning, Guido woke
After the cuckoo, so late, near noonday,
With an inordinate yawning of the jaws,
Ears plugged, eyes gummed together, palate, tongue
And teeth one mud-paste made of poppy-milk,
And found his wife flown, his scritoire the worse
For a rummage,—jewelry that was, was not,

Some money there had made itself wings too,—
The door lay wide and yet the servants slept
Sound as the dead, or dosed, which does as well
In short, Pompilia, she who, candid soul,
Had not so much as spoken all her life
To the Canon, nay, so much as peeped at him
Between her fingers while she prayed in church,—
This lamb-like innocent of fifteen years
(Such she was grown to by this time of day)
Had simply put an opiate in the drink
Of the whole household overnight, and then
Got up and gone about her work secure,
Laid hand on this waif and the other stray,
Spoiled the Philistine and marched out of doors
In company of the Canon who, Lord's love,
What with his daily duty at the church,
Nightly devoir where ladies congregate,
Had something else to mind, assure yourself,
Beside Pompilia, paragon though she be,
Or notice if her nose were sharp or blunt!
Well, anyhow, albeit impossible,
Both of them were together jollily
Jaunting it Rome-ward, half-way there by this,
While Guido was left go and get undrugged,
Gather his wits up, groaningly give thanks
When neighbours crowded round him to condole

"Ah," quoth a gossip, "well I mind me now,
"The Count did always say he thought he felt
"He feared as if this very chance might fall!
"And when a man of fifty finds his corns
"Ache and his joints throb, and foresees a storm,
"Though neighbours laugh and say the sky is clear,
"Let us henceforth believe him weatherwise!"
Then was the story told, I'll cut you short
All neighbours knew no mystery in the world
The lovers left at nightfall—over night
Had Caponsacchi come to carry off
Pompilia,—not alone, a friend of his,
One Guillichini, the more conversant
With Guido's housekeeping that he was just
A cousin of Guido's and might play a prank—
(Have not you too a cousin that's a wag?)
—Lord and a Canon also,—what would you have?
Such are the red clothed milk-swollen poppy-heads
That stand and stiffen 'mid the wheat o' the
Church!—
This worthy came to aid, abet his best
And so the house was ransacked, booty bagged,
The lady led downstairs and out of doors
Guided and guarded till, the city passed,
A carriage lay convenient at the gate
Good-bye to the friendly Canon, the loving one

Could peradventure do the rest himself
In jumps Pompilia, after her the priest,
"Whip, driver! Money makes the mare to go,
"And we 've a bagful Take the Roman road!"
So said the neighbours This was eight hours since

Guido heard all, swore the befitting oaths,
Shook off the relics of his poison-drench,
Got horse, was fairly started in pursuit
With never a friend to follow, found the track
Fast enough, 't was the straight Perugia way,
Trod soon upon their very heels, too late
By a minute only at Camoscia, reached
Chiusi, Foligno, ever the fugitives
Just ahead, just out as he galloped in,
Getting the good news ever fresh and fresh,
Till, lo, at the last stage of all, last post
Before Rome,—as we say, in sight of Rome
And safety (there 's impunity at Rome
For priests, you know) at—what 's the little place?—
What some call Castelnuovo, some just call
The Osteria, because o' the post-house inn,
There, at the journey's all but end, it seems,
Triumph deceived them and undid them both,
Secure they might foretaste felicity

Nor fear surprisal so, they were surprised
There did they halt at early evening, there
Did Guido overtake them 't was day break,
He came in time enough, not time too much,
Since in the courtyard stood the Canon's self
Urging the drowsy stable-grooms to haste
Harness the horses, have the journey end,
The trifling four-hours'-running, so reach Rome
And the other runaway, the wife? Upstairs,
Still on the couch where she had spent the night
One couch in one room, and one room for both
So gained they six hours, so were lost thereby

Sir, what's the sequel? Lover and beloved
Fall on their knees? No impudence serves here?
They beat their breasts and beg for easy death
Confess this, that and the other?—anyhow
Confess there wanted not some likelihood
To the supposition so preposterous,
That, O Pompilia, thy sequestered eyes
Had noticed, straying o'er the prayerbook's edge,
More of the Canon than that black his coat,
Buckled his shoes were, broad his hat of brim
And that, O Canon, thy religious care
Had breathed too soft a *benedicite*
To banish trouble from a lady's breast

So lonely and so lovely, nor so lean!
This you expect? Indeed, then, much you err
Not to such ordinary end as this
Had Caponsacchi flung the cassock far,
Doffed the priest, donned the perfect cavalier
The die was cast over shoes over boots
And just as she, I presently shall show,
Pompilia, soon looked Helen to the life,
Recumbent upstairs in her pink and white,
So, in the inn-yard, bold as 't were Troy-town,
There strutted Paris in correct costume,
Cloak, cap and feather, no appointment missed,
Even to a wicked-looking sword at side,
He seemed to find and feel familiar at
Nor wanted words as ready and as big
As the part he played, the bold abashless one
"I interposed to save your wife from death,
"Yourself from shame, the true and only shame
"Ask your own conscience else!—or, failing that,
"What I have done I answer, anywhere,
"Here, if you will, you see I have a sword
"Or, since I have a tonsure as you taunt,
"At Rome, by all means,—priests to try a priest
"Only, speak where your wife's voice can reply!"
And then he fingered at the sword again
So, Guido called, in aid and witness both,

The Public Force The Commissary came,
Officers also, they secured the priest,
Then, for his more confusion, mounted up
With him, a guard on either side, the stair
To the bed-room where still slept or feigned a sleep
His paramour and Guido's wife in burst
The company and bade her wake and rise

Her defence? This She woke, saw, sprang upright
I' the midst and stood as terrible as truth,
Sprang to her husband's side, caught at the sword
That hung there useless,—since they held each hand
O' the lover, had disarmed him properly,—
And in a moment out flew the bright thing
Full in the face of Guido but for help
O' the guards who held her back and pinioned her
With pains enough, she had finished you my tale
With a flourish of red all round it, pinked her man
Prettily, but she fought them one to six
They stopped that,—but her tongue continued free
She spat forth such invective at her spouse,
O'erfrothed him with such foam of murderer,
Thief, pandar—that the popular tide soon turned,
The favour of the very *sbirri*, straight
Ebbed from the husband, set toward his wife,
People cried "Hands off, pay a priest respect!"

And "persecuting fiend" and "martyred saint"
Began to lead a measure from lip to lip

But facts are facts and flinch not, stubborn things,
And the question "Prithee, friend, how comes my purse
"I' the poke of you?"—admits of no reply
Here was a priest found out in masquerade,
A wife caught playing truant if no more,
While the Count, mortified in mien enough,
And, nose to face, an added palm in length,
Was plain writ "husband" every piece of him
Capture once made, release could hardly be
Beside, the prisoners both made appeal,
"Take us to Rome!"
Taken to Rome they were,
The husband trooping after, piteously,
Tail between legs, no talk of triumph now—
No honour set firm on its feet once more
On two dead bodies of the guilty,—nay,
No dubious salve to honour's broken pate
From chance that, after all, the hurt might seem
A skin-deep matter, scratch that leaves no scar
For Guido's first search,—ferreting, poor soul,
Here, there and everywhere in the vile place
Abandoned to him when their backs were turned,

Found,—furnishing a last and best regale,—
All the love-letters bandied 'twixt the pair
Since the first timid trembling into life
O' the love star till its stand at fiery full
Mad prose, mad verse, fears, hopes, triumph, despair,
Avowal, disclaimer, plans, dates, names,—was nought
Wanting to prove, if proof consoles at all,
That this had been but the fifth act o' the piece
Whereof the due proemium, months ago
These playwrights had put forth, and ever since
Matured the middle, added 'neath his nose
He might go cross himself the case was clear

Therefore to Rome with the clear case, there plead
Each party its best, and leave law do each right,
Let law shine forth and show, as God in heaven,
Vice prostrate, virtue pedestalled at last,
The triumph of truth! What else shall glad our gaze
When once authority has knit the brow
And set the brain behind it to decide
Between the wolf and sheep turned litigants?
"This is indeed a business!" law shook head
"A husband charges hard things on a wife,
"The wife as hard o' the husband whose fault here?
"A wife that flies her husband's house, does wrong
"The male friend's interference looks amiss,

"Lends a suspicion but suppose the wife,
"On the other hand, be jeopardized at home—
"Nay, that she simply hold, ill groundedly,
"An apprehension she is jeopardized,—
"And further, if the friend partake the fear,
"And, in a commendable charity
"Which trusteth all, trust her that she mistrusts,—
"What do they but obey law—natural law?
"Pretence may this be and a cloak for sin,
"And circumstances that concur i' the close
"Hint as much, loudly—yet scarce loud enough
"To drown the answer 'strange may yet be true',
"Innocence often looks like guiltiness
"The accused declare that in thought, word and deed,
"Innocent were they both from first to last
"As male babe haply laid by female-babe
"At church on edge of the baptismal font
"Together for a minute, perfect-pure
"Difficult to believe, yet possible,
'As witness Joseph, the friend's patron-saint
"The night at the inn—there charity nigh chokes
"Ere swallow what they both asseverate,
"Though down the gullet faith may feel it go,
"When mindful of what flight fatigued the flesh
"Out of its faculty and fleshliness,
"Subdued it to the soul, as saints assure

" So long a flight necessitates a fall
" On the first bed, though in a lion's den,
" And the first pillow, though the lion's back
" Difficult to believe, yet possible
" Last come the letters' bundled beastliness—
" Authority repugns give glance to—nay,
" Turns head, and almost lets her whip-lash fall,
" Yet here a voice cries 'Respite!' from the clouds—
" The accused, both in a tale, protest, disclaim,
" Abominate the horror 'Not my hand'
" Asserts the friend—'Nor mine' chimes in the wife,
" 'Seeing I have no hand, nor write at all'
" Illiterate—for she goes on to ask,
" What if the friend did pen now verse now prose,
" Commend it to [illegible]ice now and then?
" 'T was pearls to swine she read no more than wrote,
" And kept no more than read, for as they fell
" She ever brushed the burr-like things away,
" Or, better, burned them, quenched the fire in smoke
" As for this fardel, filth and foolishness,
" She sees it now the first time burn it too!
" While for his part the friend vows ignorance
" Alike of what bears his name and bears hers
" 'T is forgery, a felon's masterpiece,
" And, as 't is said the fox still finds the stench,
" Home-manufacture and the husband's work

'Though he confesses, the ingenuous friend,
" That certain missives, letters of a sort,
" Flighty and feeble, which assigned themselves
" To the wife, no less have fallen, far too oft,
" In his path wherefrom he understood just this—
" That were they verily the lady's own
" Why, she who penned them, since he never saw
" Save for one minute the mere face of her,
" Since never had there been the interchange
" Of word with word between them all their life,
" Why, she must be the fondest of the frail,
" And fit, she for the '*apage*' he flung,
" Her letters for the flame they went to feed!
" But, now he sees her face and hears her speech,
" Much he repents him if, in fancy-freak
" For a moment the minutest measurable,
" He coupled her with the first flimsy word
" O' the self-spun fabric some mean spider-soul
" Furnished forth stop his films and stamp on him!
" Never was such a tangled knottiness,
" But thus authority cuts the Gordian through,
" And mark how her decision suits the need!
" Here 's troublesomeness, scandal on both sides,
" Plenty of fault to find, no absolute crime
" Let each side own its fault and make amends!
" What does a priest in cavalier's attire

" Consorting publicly with vagrant wives
" In quarters close as the confessional,
" Though innocent of harm? 'T is harm enough
" Let him pay it,—say, be relegate a good
" Three years, to spend in some place not too far
" Nor yet too near, midway 'twixt near and far,
" Rome and Arezzo,—Civita we choose,
" Where he may lounge away time, live at large,
" Find out the proper function of a priest,
" Nowise an exile,—that were punishment,—
" But one our love thus keeps out of harm's way
" Not more from the husband's anger than, may hap
" His own say, indiscretion, waywardness,
" And wanderings when Easter eves grow warm
" For the wife,—well, our best step to take with her,
" On her own showing, were to shift her root
" From the old cold shade and unhappy soil
" Into a generous ground that fronts the south
" Where, since her callow soul, a-shiver late,
" Craved simply warmth and called mere passers by
" To the rescue, she should have her fill of shine
" Do house and husband hinder and not help?
" Why then, forget both and stay here at peace,
" Come into our community, enroll
" Herself along with those good Convertites,
" Those sinners saved, those Magdalens re-made,

"Accept their ministration, well bestow
"Her body and patiently possess her soul,
"Until we see what better can be done
"Last for the husband if his tale prove true,
"Well is he rid of two domestic plagues—
"Both wife that ailed, do whatsoever he would,
"And friend of hers that undertook the cure
"See, what a double load we lift from breast!
"Off he may go, return, resume old life,
"Laugh at the priest here and Pompilia there
"In limbo each and punished for their pains,
"And grateful tell the inquiring neighbourhood—
"In Rome, no wrong but has its remedy"
The case was closed Now, am I fair or no
In what I utter? Do I state the facts,
Having forechosen a side? I promised you!

The Canon Caponsacchi, then, was sent
To change his garb, re-trim his tonsure, tie
The clerkly silk round, every plait correct,
Make the impressive entry on his place
Of relegation, thrill his Civita,
As Ovid, a like sufferer in the cause,
Planted a primrose-patch by Pontus where,—
What with much culture of the sonnet stave
And converse with the aborigines,

Soft savagery of eyes unused to roll
And hearts that all awry went pit-a-pat
And wanted setting right in charity,—
What were a couple of years to while away?
Pompilia, as enjoined, betook herself
To the aforesaid Convertites, soft sisterhood
In Via Lungara, where the light ones live,
Spin, pray, then sing like linnets o'er the flax.
"Anywhere, anyhow, out of my husband's house
"Is heaven," cried she,—was therefore suited so
But for Count Guido Franceschini, he-
The injured man thus righted—found no heaven
I' the house when he returned there, I engage,
Was welcomed by the city turned upside down
In a chorus of inquiry "What, back—you?
"And no wife? Left her with the Penitents?
"Ah, being young and pretty, 't were a shame
"To have her whipped in public leave the job
"To the priests who understand! Such priests as yours—
"(Pontifex Maximus whipped Vestals once)
"Our madcap Caponsacchi think of him!
"So, he fired up, showed fight and skill of fence?
"Ay, you drew also, but you did not fight!
"The wiser, 't is a word and a blow with him,
"True Caponsacchi, of old Head-i'-the-Sack
"That fought at Fiesole ere Florence was

" He had done enough, to firk you were too much
" And did the little lady menace you,
" Make at your breast with your own harmless sword?
" The spitfire! Well, thank God you 're safe and sound,
" Have kept the sixth commandment whether or no
" The lady broke the seventh I only wish
" I were as saint-like, could contain me so
" I, the poor sinner, fear I should have left
" Sir Priest no nose-tip to turn up at me!"
You, Sir, who listen but interpose no word,
Ask yourself, had you borne a baiting thus?
Was it enough to make a wise man mad?
Oh, but I 'll have your verdict at the end!

Well, not enough, it seems such mere hurt falls,
Frets awhile, aches long, then grows less and less,
And so gets done with Such was not the scheme
O' the pleasant Comparini on Guido's wound
Ever in due succession, drop by drop,
Came slow distilment from the alembic here
Set on to simmer by Canidian hate,
Corrosives keeping the man's misery raw
First fire-drop,—when he thought to make the best
O' the bad, to wring from out the sentence passed,
Poor, pitiful, absurd although it were,
Yet what might eke him out result enough

And make it worth while to have had the right
And not the wrong i' the matter judged at Rome
Inadequate her punishment, no less
Punished in some slight sort his wife had been,
Then, punished for adultery, what else?
On such admitted crime he thought to seize,
And institute procedure in the courts
Which cut corruption of this kind from man,
Cast loose a wife proved loose and castaway
He claimed in due form a divorce at least

This claim was met now by a counterclaim
Pompilia sought divorce from bed and board
Of Guido, whose outrageous cruelty,
Whose mother's malice and whose brother's hate
Were just the white o' the charge, such dreadful depths
Blackened its centre,—hints of worse than hate,
Love from that brother, by that Guido's guile,
That mother's prompting Such reply was made,
So was the engine loaded, wound up, sprung
On Guido, who received bolt full in breast,
But no less bore up, giddily perhaps
He had the Abate Paolo still in Rome,
Brother and friend and fighter on his side
They rallied in a measure, met the foe
Manlike, joined battle in the public courts,

As if to shame supine law from her sloth
And waiting her award, let beat the while
Arezzo's banter, Rome's buffoonery,
On this ear and on that ear, deaf alike,
Safe from worse outrage Let a scorpion nip,
And never mind till he contorts his tail!
But there was sting i' the creature, thus it struck
Guido had thought in his simplicity—
That lying declaration of remorse,
That story of the child which was no child
And motherhood no motherhood at all,
—That even this sin might have its sort of good
Inasmuch as no question more could be,—
Call it false, call the story true,—no claim
Of further parentage pretended now
The parents had abjured all right, at least,
I' the woman owned his wife to plead right still
Were to declare the abjuration false
He was relieved from any fear henceforth
Their hands might touch, their breath defile again
Pompilia with his name upon her yet
Well, no the next news was, Pompilia's health
Demanded change after full three long weeks
Spent in devotion with the Sisterhood,—
Which rendered sojourn,—so the court opined,—
Too irksome, since the convent's walls were high

And windows narrow, nor was air enough
Nor light enough, but all looked prison-like,
The last thing which had come in the court's head
Propose a new expedient therefore,—this!
She had demanded—had obtained indeed,
By intervention of her pitying friends
Or perhaps lovers—(beauty in distress,
Beauty whose tale is the town-talk beside,
Never lacks friendship's arm about her neck)—
Obtained remission of the penalty,
Permitted transfer to some private place
Where better air, more light, new food might soothe—
Incarcerated (call it, all the same)
At some sure friend's house she must keep inside,
Be found in at requirement fast enough,—
Domus pro carcere, in Roman style
You keep the house i' the main, as most men do
And all good women but free otherwise,
Should friends arrive, to lodge them and what not?
And such a *domum*, such a dwelling-place,
Having all Rome to choose from, where chose she?
What house obtained Pompilia's preference?
Why, just the Comparini's - just, do you mark,
Theirs who renounced all part and lot in her
So long as Guido could be robbed thereby,
And only fell back on relationship

And found their daughter safe and sound again
When that might surelier stab him yes, the pair
Who, as I told you, first had baited hook
With this poor gilded fly Pompilia-thing,
Then caught the fish, pulled Guido to the shore
And gutted him,—now found a further use
For the bait, would trail the gauze wings yet again
I' the way of what new swimmer passed their stand
They took Pompilia to their hiding-place—
Not in the heart of Rome as formerly,
Under observance, subject to control—
But out o' the way,—or in the way, who knows?
That blind mute villa lurking by the gate
At Via Paulina, not so hard to miss
By the honest eye, easy enough to find
In twilight by marauders where perchance
Some muffled Caponsacchi might repair,
Employ odd moments when he too tried change,
Found that a friend's abode was pleasanter
Than relegation, penance and the rest

Come, here 's the last drop does its worst to wound
Here 's Guido poisoned to the bone, you say,
Your boasted still's full strain and strength not so!
One master-squeeze from screw shall bring to birth
The hoard i' the heart o' the toad, hell's quintessence

He learned the true convenience of the change,
And why a convent lacks the cheerful hearts
And helpful hands which female straits require,
When, in the blind mute villa by the gate,
Pompilia—what? sang, danced, saw company?
—Gave birth, Sir, to a child, his son and heir,
Or Guido's heir and Caponsacchi's son
I want your word now what do you say to this?
What would say little Arezzo and great Rome,
And what did God say and the devil say
One at each ear o' the man, the husband, now
The father? Why, the overburdened mind
Broke down, what was a brain became a blaze
In fury of the moment—(that first news
Fell on the Count among his vines, it seems,
Doing his farm-work,)—why, he summoned steward,
Called in the first four hard hands and stout hearts
From field and furrow, poured forth his appeal,
Not to Rome's law and gospel any more,
But this clown with a mother or a wife,
That clodpole with a sister or a son
And, whereas law and gospel held their peace,
What wonder if the sticks and stones cried out?

All five soon somehow found themselves at Rome,
At the villa door there was the warmth and light—

The sense of life so just an inch inside—
Some angel must have whispered "One more chance!"

He gave it bade the others stand aside
Knocked at the door,—"Who is it knocks?" cried one
"I will make," surely Guido's angel urged,
'One final essay, last experiment,
"Speak the word, name the name from out all names
"Which, if,—as doubtless strong illusions are,
"And strange disguisings whereby truth seems false,
"And, since I am but man, I dare not do
"God's work until assured I see with God,—
"If I should bring my lips to breathe that name
"And they be innocent,—nay, by one mere touch
"Of innocence redeemed from utter guilt,-
"That name will bar the door and bid fate pass
"I will not say 'It is a messenger,
"'A neighbour, even a belated man,
"'Much less your husband's friend, your husband's self'
"At such appeal the door is bound to ope
"But I will say"—here's rhetoric and to spare!
Why, Sir, the stumbling block is cursed and kicked,
Block though it be, the name that brought offence
Will bring offence the burnt child dreads the fire
Although that fire feed on some taper-wick
Which never left the altar nor singed a fly

nd had a harmless man tripped you by chance,
ow would you wait him, stand or step aside,
hen next you heard he rolled your way? Enough

Giuseppe Caponsacchi!" Guido cried,
id open flew the door enough again
engeance, you know, burst, like a mountain-wave
iat holds a monster in it, over the house,
id wiped its filthy four walls free at last
ith a wash of hell-fire,—father, mother, wife,
illed them all, bathed his name clean in their blood,
id, reeking so, was caught, his friends and he,
aled hither and imprisoned yesternight
the day all this was
Now, Sir, tale is told,
how the old couple come to lie in state
ough hacked to pieces,—never, the expert say,
thorough a study of stabbing—while the wife
iper-like, very difficult to slay)
ithes still through every ring of her, poor wretch,
the Hospital hard by—survives, we 'll hope,
somewhat purify her putrid soul
full confession, make so much amends
ile time lasts, since at day's end die she must

r Caponsacchi,—why, they 'll have him here,

As hero of the adventure, who so fit
To figure in the coming Carnival?
'T will make the fortune of whate'er saloon
Hears him recount, with helpful cheek, and eye
Hotly indignant now, now dewy-dimmed,
The incidents of flight, pursuit, surprise,
Capture, with hints of kisses all between—
While Guido, wholly unromantic spouse,
No longer fit to laugh at since the blood
Gave the broad farce an all too brutal air,
Why, he and those four luckless friends of his
May tumble in the straw this bitter day—
Laid by the heels i' the New Prison, I hear,
To bide their trial, since trial, and for the life,
Follows if but for form's sake yes, indeed!

But with a certain issue no dispute,
"Try him," bids law formalities oblige
But as to the issue,—look me in the face!—
If the law thinks to find them guilty, Sir,
Master or men—touch one hair of the five,
Then I say in the name of all that 's left
Of honour in Rome, civility i' the world
Whereof Rome boasts herself the central source,—
There 's an end to all hope of justice more
Astræa 's gone indeed, let hope go too!

Who is it dares impugn the natural law,
Deny God's word "the faithless wife shall die"?
What, are we blind? How can we fail to learn
This crowd of miseries make the man a mark,
Accumulate on one devoted head
For our example?—yours and mine who read
Its lesson thus—"Henceforward let none dare
"Stand, like a natural in the public way,
'Letting the very urchins twitch his beard
"And tweak his nose, to earn a nickname so,
"Be styled male-Grissel or else modern Job'"
Had Guido, in the twinkling of an eye,
Summed up the reckoning, promptly paid himself,
That morning when he came up with the pair
At the wayside inn,—exacted his just debt
By aid of what first mattock, pitchfork, axe
Came to hand in the helpful stable-yard,
And with that axe, if providence so pleased,
Cloven each head, by some Rolando-stroke,
In one clean cut from crown to clavicle,
—Slain the priest-gallant, the wife-paramour,
Sticking, for all defence, in each skull's cleft
The rhyme and reason of the stroke thus dealt,
To-wit, those letters and last evidence
Of shame, each package in its proper place,—
Bidding, who pitied, undistend the skulls,—

I say, the world had praised the man But no!
That were too plain, too straight, too simply just!
He hesitates, calls law forsooth to help
And law, distasteful to who calls in law
When honour is beforehand and would serve,
What wonder if law hesitate in turn,
Plead her disuse to calls o' the kind, reply
(Smiling a little) "'T is yourself assess
"The worth of what 's lost, sum of damage done
"What you touched with so light a finger-tip,
"You whose concern it was to grasp the thing,
"Why must law gird herself and grapple with?
"Law, alien to the actor whose warm blood
"Asks heat from law whose veins run lukewarm milk,—
"What you dealt lightly with, shall law make out
"Heinous forsooth?"
Sir, what 's the good of law
In a case o' the kind? None, as she all but says
Call in law when a neighbour breaks your fence,
Cribs from your field, tampers with rent or lease,
Touches the purse or pocket,—but wooes your wife?
No take the old way trod when men were men!
Guido preferred the new path,—for his pains,
Stuck in a quagmire, floundered worse and worse
Until he managed somehow scramble back
Into the safe sure rutted road once more,

Revenged his own wrong like a gentleman
Once back 'mid the familiar prints, no doubt
He made too rash amends for his first fault,
Vaulted too loftily over what barred him late,
And lit i' the mire again,—the common chance,
The natural over energy the deed
Mal-droit yields three deaths instead of one,
And one life left for where 's the Canon s corpse?
All which is the worse for Guido, but, be frank—
The better for you and me and all the world,
Husbands of wives, especially in Rome
The thing is put right, in the old place,—ay,
The rod hangs on its nail behind the door,
Fresh from the brine a matter I commend
To the notice, during Carnival that 's near,
Of a certain what's-his-name and jackanapes
Somewhat too civil of eves with lute and song
About a house here, where I keep a wife
(You, being his cousin, may go tell him so)

III

THE OTHER HALF-ROME

ANOTHER day that finds her living yet,
Little Pompilia, with the patient brow
And lamentable smile on those poor lips,
And, under the white hospital-array,
A flower-like body, to frighten at a bruise
You 'd think, yet now, stabbed through and through again,
Alive i' the ruins 'T is a miracle
It seems that, when her husband struck her first,
She prayed Madonna just that she might live
So long as to confess and be absolved,
And whether it was that, all her sad life long
Never before successful in a prayer,
This prayer rose with authority too dread,—
Or whether, because earth was hell to her,
By compensation, when the blackness broke
She got one glimpse of quiet and the cool blue,
To show her for a moment such things were,—

Or else,—as the Augustinian Brother thinks,
The friar who took confession from her lip,—
When a probationary soul that moved
From nobleness to nobleness, as she,
Over the rough way of the world, succumbs,
Bloodies its last thorn with unflinching foot,
The angels love to do their work betimes,
Staunch some wounds here nor leave so much for God
Who knows? However it be, confessed, absolved,
She lies, with overplus of life beside
To speak and right herself from first to last,
Right the friend also, lamb pure, lion-brave,
Care for the boy's concerns, to save the son
From the sire, her two-weeks' infant orphaned thus,
And—with best smile of all reserved for him—
Pardon that sire and husband from the heart
A miracle, so tell your Molinists!

There she lies in the long white lazar-house
Rome has besieged, these two days, never doubt,
Saint Anna's where she waits her death, to hear
Though but the chink o' the bell, turn o' the hinge
When the reluctant wicket opes at last,
Lets in, on now this and now that pretence,
Too many by half,—complain the men of art,—
For a patient in such plight The lawyers first

Paid the due visit—justice must be done,
They took her witness, why the murder was
Then the priests followed properly,—a soul
To shrive, 't was Brother Celestine's own right,
The same who noises thus her gifts abroad
But many more, who found they were old friends,
Pushed in to have their stare and take their talk
And go forth boasting of it and to boast
Old Monna Baldi chatters like a jay,
Swears—but that, prematurely trundled out
Just as she felt the benefit begin,
The miracle was snapped up by somebody,—
Her palsied limb 'gan prick and promise life
At touch o' the bedclothes merely,—how much m(
Had she but brushed the body as she tried!
Cavalier Carlo—well, there 's some excuse
For him—Maratta who paints Virgins so—
He too must fee the porter and slip by
With pencil cut and paper squared, and straight
There was he figuring away at face
"A lovelier face is not in Rome," cried he,
"Shaped like a peacock's egg, the pure as pearl,
"That hatches you anon a snow-white chick"
Then, oh that pair of eyes, that pendent hair,
Black this and black the other! Mighty fine—
But nobody cared ask to paint the same,

Nor grew a poet over hair and eyes
Four little years ago when, ask and have,
The woman who wakes all this rapture leaned
Flower-like from out her window long enough,
As much uncomplimented as uncropped
By comers and goers in Via Vittoria eh?
'T is just a flower's fate past parterre we trip,
Till peradventure someone plucks our sleeve—
"Yon blossom at the briar's end, that 's the rose
"Two jealous people fought for yesterday
"And killed each other see, there 's undisturbed
"A pretty pool at the root, of rival red!"
Then cry we "Ah, the perfect paragon!"
Then crave we "Just one keepsake-leaf for us!"

Truth lies between there 's anyhow a child
Of seventeen years, whether a flower or weed,
Ruined who did it shall account to Christ—
Having no pity on the harmless life
And gentle face and girlish form he found,
And thus flings back Go practise if you please
With men and women leave a child alone
For Christ's particular love's sake!—so I say

Somebody, at the bedside, said much more,
Took on him to explain the secret cause

O' the crime quoth he, "Such crimes are very rife,
"Explode nor make us wonder now-a-days,
"Seeing that Antichrist disseminates
"That doctrine of the Philosophic Sin
"Molinos' sect will soon make earth too hot!"
"Nay," groaned the Augustinian, "what 's there new?
"Crime will not fail to flare up from men's hearts
"While hearts are men's and so born criminal,
"Which one fact, always old yet ever new,
"Accounts for so much crime that, for my part,
"Molinos may go whistle to the wind
"That waits outside a certain church, you know!"

Though really it does seem as if she here,
Pompilia, living so and dying thus,
Has had undue experience how much crime
A heart can hatch Why was she made to learn
—Not you, not I, not even Molinos' self—
What Guido Franceschini's heart could hold?
Thus saintship is effected probably,
No sparing saints the process!—which the more
Tends to the reconciling us, no saints,
To sinnership, immunity and all

For see now Pietro and Violante's life
Till seventeen years ago, all Rome might note

And quote for happy—see the signs distinct
Of happiness as we yon Triton's trump
What could they be but happy?—balanced so,
Nor low i' the social scale nor yet too high,
Nor poor nor richer than comports with ease,
Nor bright and envied, nor obscure and scorned,
Nor so young that their pleasures fell too thick,
Nor old past catching pleasure when it fell,
Nothing above, below the just degree,
All at the mean where joy's components mix
So again, in the couple's very souls
You saw the adequate half with half to match,
Each having and each lacking somewhat, both
Making a whole that had all and lacked nought
The round and sound, in whose composure just
The acquiescent and recipient side
Was Pietro's, and the stirring striving one
Violante's both in union gave the due
Quietude, enterprise, craving and content,
Which go to bodily health and peace of mind
But, as 't is said a body, rightly mixed,
Each element in equipoise, would last
Too long and live for ever,—accordingly
Holds a germ—sand-grain weight too much i' the scale—
Ordained to get predominance one day

And so bring all to ruin and release,—
Not otherwise a fatal germ lurked here
"With mortals much must go, but something stays,
"Nothing will stay of our so happy selves"
Out of the very ripeness of life's core
A worm was bred—"Our life shall leave no fruit"
Enough of bliss, they thought, could bliss bear seed,
Yield its like, propagate a bliss in turn
And keep the kind up, not supplant themselves
But put in evidence, record they were,
Show them, when done with, i' the shape of a child
"'T is in a child, man and wife grow complete,
"One flesh God says so let him do his work!"

Now, one reminder of this gnawing want,
One special prick o' the maggot at the core,
Always befell when, as the day came round,
A certain yearly sum,—our Pietro being,
As the long name runs, an usufructuary,—
Dropped in the common bag as interest
Of money, his till death, not afterward,
Failing an heir an heir would take and take,
A child of theirs be wealthy in their place
To nobody's hurt—the stranger else seized all
Prosperity rolled river-like and stopped,
Making their mill go, but when wheel wore out,

The wave would find a space and sweep on free
And, half-a-mile off, grind some neighbour's corn

Adam-like, Pietro sighed and said no more
Eve saw the apple was fair and good to taste,
So, plucked it, having asked the snake advice
She told her husband God was merciful,
And his and her prayer granted at the last
Let the old mill-stone moulder,—wheel unworn,
Quartz from the quarry, shot into the stream
Adroitly, as before should go bring grist—
Their house continued to them by an heir,
Their vacant heart replenished with a child
We have her own confession at full length
Made in the first remorse 't was Jubilee
Pealed in the ear o' the conscience and it woke
She found she had offended God no doubt,
So much was plain from what had happened since,
Misfortune on misfortune, but she harmed
No one i' the world, so far as she could see
The act had gladdened Pietro to the height,
Her spouse whom God himself must gladden so
Or not at all, thus much seems probable
From the implicit faith, or rather say
Stupid credulity of the foolish man
Who swallowed such a tale nor strained a whit

Even at his wife's far-over-fifty years
Matching his sixty-and-under Him she blessed,
And as for doing any detriment
To the veritable heir,—why, tell her first
Who was he? Which of all the hands held up
I' the crowd, one day would gather round their gate,
Did she so wrong by intercepting thus
The ducat, spendthrift fortune thought to fling
For a scramble just to make the mob break shins?
She kept it, saved them kicks and cuffs thereby
While at the least one good work had she wrought,
Good, clearly and incontestably! Her cheat—
What was it to its subject, the child's self,
But charity and religion? See the girl!
A body most like—a soul too probably—
Doomed to death, such a double death as waits
The illicit offspring of a common trull,
Sure to resent and forthwith rid herself
Of a mere interruption to sin's trade,
In the efficacious way old Tiber knows
Was not so much proved by the ready sale
O' the child, glad transfer of this irksome chance?
Well then, she had caught up this castaway
This fragile egg, some careless wild bird dropped,
She had picked from where it waited the foot-fall,
And put in her own breast till forth broke finch

Able to sing God praise on mornings now
What so excessive harm was done?—she asked

To which demand the dreadful answer comes—
For that same deed, now at Lorenzo's church,
Both agents, conscious and unconscious, lie,
While she, the deed was done to benefit,
Lies also, the most lamentable of things,
Yonder where curious people count her breaths,
Calculate how long yet the little life
Unspilt may serve their turn nor spoil the show,
Give them their story, then the church its group

Well, having gained Pompilia, the girl grew
I' the midst of Pietro here, Violante there,
Each, like a semicircle with stretched arms,
Joining the other round her preciousness—
Two walls that go about a garden-plot
Where a chance sliver, branchlet slipt from bole
Of some tongue-leaved eye-figured Eden tree,
Filched by two exiles and borne far away,
Patiently glorifies their solitude,—
Year by year mounting, grade by grade surmount
The builded brick-work, yet is compassed still,
Still hidden happily and shielded safe,—
Else why should miracle have graced the ground?

But on the twelfth sun that brought April there
What meant that laugh? The coping-stone was reached,
Nay, above towered a light tuft of bloom
To be toyed with by butterfly or bee,
Done good to or else harm to from outside
Pompilia's root, stalk and a branch or two
Home enclosed still, the rest would be the world's
All which was taught our couple though obtuse,
Since walls have ears, when one day brought a priest,
Smooth-mannered soft-speeched sleek-cheeked visitor
The notable Abate Paolo—known
As younger brother of a Tuscan house
Whereof the actual representative,
Count Guido, had employed his youth and age
In culture of Rome's most productive plant—
A cardinal but years pass and change comes,
In token of which, here was our Paolo brought
To broach a weighty business Might he speak?
Yes—to Violante somehow caught alone
While Pietro took his after dinner doze,
And the young maiden, busily as befits,
Minded her broider-frame three chambers off

So—giving now his great flap-hat a gloss
With flat o' the hand between-whiles, soothing now
The silk from out its creases o'er the calf,

Setting the stocking clerical again,
But never disengaging, once engaged,
The thin clear grey hold of his eyes on her—
He dissertated on that Tuscan house,
Those Franceschini,—very old they were—
Not rich however—oh, not rich, at least,
As people look to be who, low i' the scale
One way, have reason, rising all they can
By favour of the money-bag! 't is fair—
Do all gifts go together? But don't suppose
That being not so rich means all so poor!
Say rather, well enough—i' the way, indeed,
Ha, ha, to fortune better than the best
Since if his brother's patron friend kept faith,
Put into promised play the Cardinalate,
Their house might wear the red cloth that keeps warm,
Would but the Count have patience—there 's the point!
For he was slipping into years apace,
And years make men restless—they needs must spy
Some certainty, some sort of end assured,
Some sparkle, tho' from topmost beacon-tip,
That warrants life a harbour through the haze
In short, call him fantastic as you choose,
Guido was home-sick, yearned for the old sights
And usual faces,—fain would settle himself
And have the patron's bounty when it fell

Irrigate far rather than deluge near,
Go fertilize Arezzo, not flood Rome
Sooth to say, 't was the wiser wish the Count
Proved wanting in ambition,—let us avouch,
Since truth is best,—in callousness of heart,
And winced at pin-pricks whereby honours hang
A ribbon o'er each puncture his—no soul
Ecclesiastic (here the hat was brushed)
Humble but self-sustaining, calm and cold,
Having, as one who puts his hand to the plough,
Renounced the over-vivid family-feel—
Poor brother Guido! All too plain, he pined
Amid Rome's pomp and glare for dinginess
And that dilapidated palace shell
Vast as a quarry and, very like, as bare—
Since to this comes old grandeur now-a-days—
Or that absurd wild villa in the waste
O' the hill side, breezy though, for who likes air,
Vittiano, nor unpleasant with its vines,
Outside the city and the summer heats
And now his harping on this one tense chord
The villa and the palace, palace this
And villa the other, all day and all night
Creaked like the implacable cicala's cry
And made one's ear-drum ache nought else would serve

But that, to light his mother's visage up
With second youth, hope, gaiety again,
He must find straightway, woo and haply win
And bear away triumphant back, some wife
Well now, the man was rational in his way
He, the Abate,—ought he to interpose?
Unless by straining still his tutelage
(Priesthood leaps over elder-brothership)
Across this difficulty then let go,
Leave the poor fellow in peace! Would that be wrong?
There was no making Guido great, it seems,
Spite of himself then happy be his dole!
Indeed, the Abate's little interest
Was somewhat nearly touched i' the case, they saw
Since if his simple kinsman so were bent,
Began his rounds in Rome to catch a wife,
Full soon would such unworldliness surprise
The rare bird, sprinkle salt on phœnix' tail,
And so secure the nest a sparrow-hawk.
No lack of mothers here in Rome,—no dread
Of daughters lured as larks by looking-glass!
The first name-pecking credit-scratching fowl
Would drop her unfledged cuckoo in our nest
To gather greyness there, give voice at length
And shame the brood but it was long ago

When crusades were, and we sent eagles forth!
No, that at least the Abate could forestall
He read the thought within his brother's word,
Knew what he purposed better than himself
We want no name and fame—having our own
No worldly aggrandizement—such we fly
But if some wonder of a woman's-heart
Were yet untainted on this grimy earth,
Tender and true—tradition tells of such—
Prepared to pant in time and tune with ours—
If some good girl (a girl, since she must take
The new bent, live new life, adopt new modes)
Not wealthy (Guido for his rank was poor)
But with whatever dowry came to hand,—
There were the lady-love predestinate!
And somehow the Abate's guardian eye—
Scintillant, rutilant, fraternal fire,—
Roving round every way had seized the prize
—The instinct of us, we, the spiritualty!
Come, cards on table, was it true or false
That here—here in this very tenement—
Yea, Via Vittoria did a marvel hide,
Lily of a maiden, white with intact leaf
Guessed thro' the sheath that saved it from the sun?
A daughter with the mother's hands still clasped
Over her head for fillet virginal,

A wife worth Guido's house and hand and heart?
He came to see, had spoken, he could no less—
(A final cherish of the stockinged calf)
If harm were,—well, the matter was off his mind

Then with the great air did he kiss, devout,
Violante's hand, and rise up his whole height
(A certain purple gleam about the black)
And go forth grandly,—as if the Pope came next
And so Violante rubbed her eyes awhile,
Got up too, walked to wake her Pietro soon
And pour into his ear the mighty news
How somebody had somehow somewhere seen
Their tree-top tuft of bloom above the wall,
And came now to apprize them the tree's self
Was no such crab-sort as should go feed swine,
But veritable gold, the Hesperian ball
Ordained for Hercules to haste and pluck,
And bear and give the Gods to banquet with—
Hercules standing ready at the door
Whereon did Pietro rub his eyes in turn,
Look very wise, a little woeful too,
Then, periwig on head, and cane in hand,
Sally forth dignifiedly into the Square
Of Spain across Babbuino the six steps,
Toward the Boat-fountain where our idlers lounge,—

Ask, for form's sake, who Hercules might be,
And have congratulation from the world

Heartily laughed the world in his fool's-face
And told him Hercules was just the heir
To the stubble once a corn-field and brick-heap
Where used to be a dwelling-place now burned.
Guido and Franceschini, a Count,—ay
But a cross i' the poke to bless the Countship? No!
All gone except sloth, pride, rapacity,
Humours of the imposthume incident
To rich blood that runs thin,—nursed to a head
By the rankly salted soil—a cardinal's court
Where, parasite and picker-up of crumbs,
He had hung on long, and now, let go, said some,
Shaken off, said others,—but in any case
Tired of the trade and something worse for wear,
Was wanting to change town for country quick,
Go home again let Pietro help him home!
The brother, Abate Paolo, shrewder mouse,
Had pricked for comfortable quarters, inched
Into the core of Rome, and fattened so,
But Guido, over-burly for rat's hole
Suited to clerical slimness, starved outside,
Must shift for himself and so the shift was this!
What, was the snug retreat of Pietro tracked,

The little provision for his old age snuffed?
" Oh, make your girl a lady, an you list,
' But have more mercy on our wit than vaunt
" Your bargain as we burgesses who brag!
" Why, Goodman Dullard, if a friend must speak,
" Would the Count, think you, stoop to you and yours
" Were there the value of one penny-piece
" To rattle 'twixt his palms—or likelier laugh,
" Bid your Pompilia help you black his shoe?"

Home again, shaking off the puzzled pate,
Went Pietro to announce a change indeed,
Yet point Violante where some solace lay
Of a rueful sort,—the taper, quenched so soon,
Had ended merely in a snuff, not stink—
Congratulate there was one hope the less
Not misery the more and so an end

The marriage thus impossible, the rest
Followed our spokesman, Paolo, heard his fate,
Resignedly Count Guido bore the blow
Violante wiped away the transient tear,
Renounced the playing Danae to gold dreams,
Praised much her Pietro's prompt sagaciousness,
Found neighbours' envy natural, lightly laughed
At gossips' malice, fairly wrapped herself

In her integrity three folds about,
And, letting pass a little day or two,
Threw, even over that integrity,
Another wrapping, namely one thick veil
That hid her, matron-wise, from head to foot,
And, by the hand holding a girl veiled too,
Stood, one dim end of a December day,
In Saint Lorenzo on the altar-step—
Just where she lies now and that girl will lie—
Only with fifty candles' company
Now, in the place of the poor winking one
Which saw,—doors shut and sacristan made sure,—
A priest—perhaps Abate Paolo—wed
Guido clandestinely, irrevocably
To his Pompilia aged thirteen years
And five months,—witness the church register,—
Pompilia, (thus become Count Guido's wife
Clandestinely, irrevocably his,)
Who all the while had borne, from first to last,
As brisk a part i' the bargain, as yon lamb,
Brought forth from basket and set out for sale,
Bears while they chaffer, wary market-man
And voluble housewife, o'er it,—each in turn
Patting the curly calm inconscious head,
With the shambles ready round the corner there,
When the talk 's talked out and a bargain struck

Transfer complete, why, Pietro was apprised
Violante sobbed the sobs and prayed the prayers
And said the serpent tempted so she fell,
Till Pietro had to clear his brow apace
And make the best of matters wrath at first,—
How else? pacification presently,
Why not?—could flesh withstand the impurpled one,
The very Cardinal, Paolo's patron-friend?
Who, justifiably surnamed "a hinge,"
Knew where the mollifying oil should drop
To cure the creak o' the valve,—considerate
For frailty, patient in a naughty world
He even volunteered to supervise
The rough draught of those marriage-articles
Signed in a hurry by Pietro, since revoked
Trust's politic, suspicion does the harm,
There is but one way to brow-beat this world,
Dumb founder doubt, and repay scorn in kind,—
To go on trusting, namely, till faith move
Mountains

And faith here made the mountains move
Why, friends whose zeal cried "Caution ere too late!"—
Bade "Pause ere jump, with both feet joined, on slough!"—

Counselled "If rashness then, now temperance!"—
Heard for their pains that Pietro had closed eyes,
Jumped and was in the middle of the mire,
Money and all, just what should sink a man
By the mere marriage, Guido gained forthwith
Dowry, his wife's right, no rescinding there
But Pietro, why must he needs ratify
One gift Violante gave, pay down one doit
Promised in first fool's-flurry? Grasp the bag
Lest the son 's service flag,—is reason and rhyme,
Above all when the son 's a son-in-law
Words to the wind! The parents cast their lot
Into the lap o' the daughter and the son
Now with a right to lie there, took what fell,
Pietro's whole having and holding, house and field,
Goods, chattels and effects, his worldly worth
Present and in perspective, all renounced
In favour of Guido As for the usufruct—
The interest now, the principal anon,
Would Guido please to wait, at Pietro's death
Till when, he must support the couple's charge,
Bear with them, housemates, pensionaries, pawned
To an alien for fulfilment of their pact
Guido should at discretion deal them orts,
Bread bounty in Arezzo the strange place,—
They who had lived deliciously and rolled

Rome's choicest comfit 'neath the tongue before
Into this quag, "jump" bade the Cardinal!
And neck-deep in a minute there flounced they

But they touched bottom at Arezzo there—
Four months' experience of how craft and greed
Quickened by penury and pretentious hate
Of plain truth, brutify and bestialize,—
Four months' taste of apportioned insolence,
Cruelty graduated, dose by dose
Of ruffianism dealt out at bed and board,
And lo, the work was done, success clapped hands
The starved, stripped, beaten brace of stupid dupes
Broke at last in their desperation loose,
Fled away for their lives, and lucky so,
Found their account in casting coat afar
And bearing off a shred of skin at least
Left Guido lord o' the prey, as the lion is,
And, careless what came after, carried their wrongs
To Rome,—I nothing doubt, with such remorse
As folly feels, since pain can make it wise,
But crime, past wisdom, which is innocence,
Needs not be plagued with till a later day

Pietro went back to beg from door to door,
In hope that memory not quite extinct

Of cheery days and festive nights would move
Friends and acquaintance—after the natural laugh,
And tributary "Just as we foretold—"
To show some bowels, give the dregs o' the cup,
Scraps of the trencher, to their host that was,
Or let him share the mat with the mastiff, he
Who lived large and kept open house so long
Not so Violante ever a-head i' the march,
Quick at the bye-road and the cut-across,
She went first to the best adviser, God—
Whose finger unmistakably was felt
In all this retribution of the past
Here was the prize of sin, luck of a lie!
But here too was what Holy Year would help,
Bound to rid sinners of sin vulgar, sin
Abnormal, sin prodigious, up to sin
Impossible and supposed for Jubilee' sake
To lift the leadenest of lies, let soar
The soul unhampered by a feather-weight
"I will" said she "go burn out this bad hole
"That breeds the scorpion, baulk the plague at least
"Of hope to further plague by progeny
"I will confess my fault, be punished, yes,
"But pardoned too Saint Peter pays for all"

So, with the crowd she mixed, made for the dome,

Through the great door new-broken for the nonce
Marched, muffled more than ever matron-wise,
Up the left nave to the formidable throne,
Fell into file with this the poisoner
And that the parricide, and reached in turn
The poor repugnant Penitentiary
Set at this gully-hole o' the world's discharge
To help the frightfullest of filth have vent,
And then knelt down and whispered in his ear
How she had bought Pompilia, palmed the babe
On Pietro, passed the girl off as their child
To Guido, and defrauded of his due
This one and that one,—more than she could name,
Until her solid piece of wickedness
Happened to split and spread woe far and wide
Contritely now she brought the case for cure

Replied the throne—"Ere God forgive the guilt,
"Make man some restitution! Do your part!
"The owners of your husband's heritage,
"Barred thence by this pretended birth and heir,—
"Tell them, the bar came so, is broken so,
"Theirs be the due reversion as before!
"Your husband who, no partner in the guilt,
"Suffers the penalty, led blindfold thus
"By love of what he thought his flesh and blood

"To alienate his all in her behalf,—
"Tell him too such contract is null and void!
"Last, he who personates your son-in-law,
"Who with sealed eyes and stopped ears, tame and mute,
"Took at your hand that bastard of a whore
"You called your daughter and he calls his wife,—
"Tell him, and bear the anger which is just!
"Then, penance so performed, may pardon be!"

Who could gainsay this just and right award?
Nobody in the world but, out o' the world,
Who knows?—might timid intervention be
From any makeshift of an angel-guide,
Substitute for celestial guardianship,
Pretending to take care of the girl's self
"Woman, confessing crime is healthy work,
"And telling truth relieves a liar like you,
"But how of my quite unconsidered charge?
"No thought if, while this good befalls yourself,
"Aught in the way of harm may find out her?"
No least thought, I assure you truth being truth,
Tell it and shame the devil!
Said and done
Home went Violante, disbosomed all
And Pietro who, six months before, had borne
Word after word of such a piece of news

Like so much cold steel inched through his breast-
blade,
Now at its entry gave a leap for joy
As who—what did I say of one in a quag?—
Should catch a hand from heaven and spring thereby
Out of the mud, on ten toes stand once more
'What? All that used to be, may be again?
"My money mine again, my house, my land,
"My chairs and tables, all mine evermore?
"Why, the girl's dowry never was the girl's,
"And, unpaid yet, is never now to pay?
"Then the girl's self, my pale Pompilia child
"That used to be my own with her great eyes—
"He who drove us forth, why should he keep her
"When proved as very a pauper as himself?
"Will she come back, with nothing changed at all,
"And laugh 'But how you dreamed uneasily!
"'I saw the great drops stand here on your brow—
"'Did I do wrong to wake you with a kiss?'
"No, indeed, darling! No, for wide awake
"I see another outburst of surprise
"The lout-lord, bully-beggar, braggart sneak,
"Who not content with cutting purse, crops ear—
"Assuredly it shall be salve to mine
"When this great news red-letters him, the rogue!
"Ay, let him taste the teeth o' the trap, this fox,

" Give us our lamb back, golden fleece and all,
" Let her creep in and warm our breasts again!
" Why care for the past? We three are our old selves,
' And know now what the outside world is worth "
And so, he carried case before the courts,
And there Violante, blushing to the bone,
Made public declaration of her fault,
Renounced her motherhood, and prayed the law
To interpose, frustrate of its effect
Her folly, and redress the injury done

Whereof was the disastrous consequence,
That though indisputably clear the case
(For thirteen years are not so large a lapse,
And still six witnesses survived in Rome
To prove the truth o' the tale)— yet, patent wrong
Seemed Guido's, the first cheat had chanced on him
Here was the pity that, deciding right,
Those who began the wrong would gain the prize
Guido pronounced the story one long lie
Lied to do robbery and take revenge
Or say it were no lie at all but truth,
Then, it both robbed the right heirs and shamed him
Without revenge to humanize the deed
What had he done when first they shamed him thus?
But that were too fantastic losels they,

And leasing this world's-wonder of a lie,
They lied to blot him though it brand themselves

So answered Guido through the Abate's mouth
Wherefore the court, its customary way,
Inclined to the middle course the sage affect
They held the child to be a changeling,—good
But, lest the husband got no good thereby,
They willed the dowry, though not hers at all,
Should yet be his, if not by right then grace—
Part-payment for the plain injustice done
As for that other contract, Pietro's work,
Renunciation of his own estate,
That must be cancelled—give him back his gifts,
He was no party to the cheat at least!
So ran the judgment —whence a prompt appeal
On both sides, seeing right is absolute
Cried Pietro "Is the child no child of mine?
"Why give her a child's dowry?"—"Have I right
"To the dowry, why not to the rest as well?"
Cried Guido, or cried Paolo in his name
Till law said "Reinvestigate the case!"
And so the matter pends, to this same day

Hence new disaster—here no outlet seemed,
Whatever the fortune of the battle-field,

No path whereby the fatal man might march
Victorious, wreath on head and spoils in hand,
And back turned full upon the baffled foe,—
Nor cranny whence, desperate and disgraced,
Stripped to the skin, he might be fain to crawl
Worm-like, and so away with his defeat
To other fortune and a novel prey
No, he was pinned to the place there, left alone
With his immense hate and, the solitary
Subject to satisfy that hate, his wife
"Cast her off? Turn her naked out of doors?
"Easily said! But still the action pends,
"Still dowry, principal and interest,
"Pietro's possessions, all I bargained for,—
"Any good day, be but my friends alert,
"May give them me if she continue mine
"Yet, keep her? Keep the puppet of my foes—
"Her voice that lisps me back their curse—her eye
"They lend their leer of triumph to—her lip
"I touch and taste their very filth upon?"

In short, he also took the middle course
Rome taught him—did at last excogitate
How he might keep the good and leave the bad
Twined in revenge, yet extricable,—nay
Make the very hate's eruption, very rush

Of the unpent sluice of cruelty relieve
His heart first, then go fertilize his field
What if the girl-wife, tortured with due care,
Should take, as though spontaneously, the road
It were impolitic to thrust her on?
If, goaded, she broke out in full revolt,
Followed her parents i' the face o' the world,
Branded as runaway not castaway,
Self-sentenced and self-punished in the act?
So should the loathed form and detested face
Launch themselves into hell and there be lost
While he looked o'er the brink with folded arms,
So should the heaped-up shames go shuddering back
O' the head o' the heapers, Pietro and his wife,
And bury in the breakage three at once
While Guido, left free, no one right renounced,
Gain present, gain prospective, all the gain,
None of the wife except her rights absorbed,
Should ask law what it was law paused about—
If law were dubious still whose word to take,
The husband's—dignified and derelict,
Or the wife's—the what I tell you It should be

Guido's first step was to take pen, indite
A letter to the Abate,—not his own,
His wife's,—she should re-write, sign, seal and send

She liberally told the household-news,
Rejoiced her vile progenitors were gone,
Revealed their malice—how they even laid
A last injunction on her, when they fled,
That she should forthwith find a paramour,
Complot with him to gather spoil enough,
Then burn the house down,—taking previous care
To poison all its inmates overnight,—
And so companioned, so provisioned too,
Follow to Rome and there join fortunes gay
This letter, traced in pencil characters,
Guido as easily got re-traced in ink
By his wife's pen, guided from end to end,
As if it had been just so much Chinese
For why? That wife could broider, sing perhaps,
Pray certainly, but no more read than write
This letter "which yet write she must," he said,
"Being half courtesy and compliment,
"Half sisterliness take the thing on trust!"
She had as readily re-traced the words
Of her own death-warrant,—in some sort 't was so
This letter the Abate in due course
Communicated to such curious souls
In Rome as needs must pry into the cause
Of quarrel, why the Comparini fled
The Franceschini, whence the grievance grew,

What the hubbub meant "No,—see the wife's own
word,
"Authentic answer! Tell detractors too
"There's a plan formed, a programme figured here
'—Pray God no after practice put to proof,
"This letter cast no light upon, one day!"

So much for what should work in Rome back now
To Arezzo, follow up the project here,
Forward the next step with as bold a foot,
And plague Pompilia to the height, you see!
Accordingly did Guido set himself
To worry up and down, across, around,
The woman, hemmed in by her household-bars,—
Chase her about the coop of daily life,
Having first stopped each outlet thence save one
Which, like bird with a ferret in her haunt,
She needs must seize as sole way of escape
Though there was tied and twittering a decoy
To seem as if it tempted,—just the plume
O' the popinjay, not a real respite there
From tooth and claw of something in the dark,—
Giuseppe Caponsacchi

Now begins
The tenebrific passage of the tale
How hold a light, display the cavern's gorge?

How, in this phase of the affair, show truth?
Here is the dying wife who smiles and says
"So it was,—so it was not,—how it was,
"I never knew nor ever care to know—"
Till they all weep, physician, man of law,
Even that poor old bit of battered brass
Beaten out of all shape by the world's sins,
Common utensil of the lazar-house—
Confessor Celestino groans "'T is truth,
"All truth and only truth there 's something here,
"Some presence in the room beside us all,
"Something that every lie expires before
"No question she was pure from first to last"
So far is well and helps us to believe
But beyond, she the helpless, simple-sweet
Or silly-sooth, unskilled to break one blow
At her good fame by putting finger forth,—
How can she render service to the truth?
The bird says "So I fluttered where a springe
"Caught me the springe did not contrive itself,
"That I know who contrived it, God forgive!"
But we, who hear no voice and have dry eyes,
Must ask,—we cannot else, absolving her,—
How of the part played by that same decoy
I' the catching, caging? Was himself caught first?
We deal here with no innocent at least,

No witless victim,—he 's a man of the age
And priest beside,—persuade the mocking world
Mere charity boiled over in this sort!
He whose own safety too,—(the Pope 's apprised—
Good-natured with the secular offence,
The Pope looks grave on priesthood in a scrape)
Our priest's own safety therefore, may-be life,
Hangs on the issue! You will find it hard
Guido is here to meet you with fixed foot,
Stiff like a statue—"Leave what went before!
"My wife fled i' the company of a priest,
"Spent two days and two nights alone with him
"Leave what came after!" He stands hard to throw
Moreover priests are merely flesh and blood,
When we get weakness, and no guilt beside,
'Tis no such great ill-fortune finding grey,
We gladly call that white which might be black,
Too used to the double-dye So, if the priest
Moved by Pompilia's youth and beauty, gave
Way to the natural weakness Anyhow
Here be facts, charactery, what they spell
Determine, and thence pick what sense you may!
There was a certain young bold handsome priest
Popular in the city, far and wide
Famed, since Arezzo 's but a little place,
As the best of good companions, gay and grave

At the decent minute, settled in his stall,
Or sidling, lute on lap, by lady's couch,
Ever the courtly Canon, see in him
A proper star to climb and culminate,
Have its due handbreadth of the heaven at Rome,
Though meanwhile pausing on Arezzo's edge,
As modest candle does 'mid mountain fog,
To rub off redness and rusticity
Ere it sweep chastened, gain the silver-sphere!
Whether through Guido's absence or what else,
This Caponsacchi, favourite of the town,
Was yet no friend of his nor free o' the house,
Though both moved in the regular magnates' march
Each must observe the other's tread and halt
At church, saloon, theatre, house of play
Who could help noticing the husband's slouch,
The black of his brow—or miss the news that buzzed
Of how the little solitary wife
Wept and looked out of window all day long?
What need of minute search into such springs
As start men, set o' the move?—machinery
Old as earth, obvious as the noonday sun
Why, take men as they come,—an instance now,—
Of all those who have simply gone to see
Pompilia on her deathbed since four days,
Half at the least are, call it how you please,

In love with her—I don't except the priests
Nor even the old confessor whose eyes run
Over at what he styles his sister's voice
Who died so early and weaned him from the world
Well, had they viewed her ere the paleness pushed
The last o' the red o' the rose away, while yet
Some hand, adventurous 'twixt the wind and her,
Might let shy life run back and raise the flower
Rich with reward up to the guardian's face,—
Would they have kept that hand employed all day
At fumbling on with prayer-book pages? No!
Men are men why then need I say one word
More than that our mere man the Canon here
Saw, pitied, loved Pompilia?

This is why,
This startling why that Caponsacchi's self—
Whom foes and friends alike avouch, for good
Or ill, a man of truth whate'er betide,
Intrepid altogether, reckless too
How his own fame and fortune, tossed to the winds,
Suffer by any turn the adventure take,
Nay, more—not thrusting, like a badge to hide,
'Twixt shirt and skin a joy which shown is shame—
But flirting flag-like i' the face o' the world
This tell-tale kerchief, this conspicuous love

For the lady,—oh, called innocent love, I know!
Only, such scarlet fiery innocence
As most folk would try muffle up in shade,—
—'T is strange then that this else abashless mouth
Should yet maintain, for truth's sake which is God's,
That it was not he made the first advance,
That, even ere word had passed between the two,
Pompilia penned him letters, passionate prayers,
If not love, then so simulating love
That he, no novice to the taste of thyme,
Turned from such over-luscious honey-clot
At end o' the flower, and would not lend his lip
Till . but the tale here frankly outsoars faith
There must be falsehood somewhere For her part,
Pompilia quietly constantly avers
She never penned a letter in her life
Nor to the Canon nor any other man,
Being incompetent to write and read
Nor had she ever uttered word to him, nor he
To her till that same evening when they met,
She on her window-terrace, he beneath
I' the public street, as was their fateful chance,
And she adjured him in the name of God
To find out, bring to pass where, when and how
Escape with him to Rome might be contrived
Means were found, plan laid, time fixed, she avers,

And heart assured to heart in loyalty,
All at an impulse! All extemporized
As in romance-books! Is that credible?
Well, yes as she avers this with calm mouth
Dying, I do think "Credible!" you'd cry—
Did not the priest's voice come to break the spell
They questioned him apart, as the custom is,
When first the matter made a noise at Rome,
And he, calm, constant then as she is now,
For truth's sake did assert and re-assert
Those letters called him to her and he came,
—Which damns the story credible otherwise
Why should this man,—mad to devote himself,
Careless what comes of his own fame, the first,—
Be studious thus to publish and declare
Just what the lightest nature loves to hide,
So screening lady from the byword's laugh
"First spoke the lady, last the cavalier!"
—I say,—why should the man tell truth just now
When graceful lying meets such ready shrift?
Or is there a first moment for a priest
As for a woman, when invaded shame
Must have its first and last excuse to show?
Do both contrive love's entry in the mind
Shall look, i' the manner of it, a surprise,—
That after, once the flag o' the fort hauled down,

Effrontery may sink drawbridge, open gate,
Welcome and entertain the conqueror?
Or what do you say to a touch of the devil's worst?
Can it be that the husband, he who wrote
The letter to his brother I told you of,
I' the name of her it meant to criminate,—
What if he wrote those letters to the priest?
Further the priest says, when it first befell,
This folly o' the letters, that he checked the flow,
Put them back lightly each with its reply
Here again vexes new discrepancy
There never reached her eye a word from him
He did write but she could not read—could just
Burn the offence to wifehood, womanhood,
So did burn never bade him come to her,
Yet when it proved he must come, let him come,
And when he did come though uncalled,—why, spoke
Prompt by an inspiration thus it chanced
Will you go somewhat back to understand?

When first, pursuant to his plan, there sprang,
Like an uncaged beast, Guido's cruelty
On soul and body of his wife, she cried
To those whom law appoints resource for such,
The secular guardian,—that 's the Governor,
And the Archbishop,—that 's the spiritual guide,

And prayed them take the claws from out her flesh
Now, this is ever the ill consequence
Of being noble, poor and difficult,
Ungainly, yet too great to disregard,—
This—that born peers and friends hereditary,—
Though disinclined to help from their own store
The opprobrious wight, put penny in his poke
From private purse or leave the door ajar
When he goes wistful by at dinner time,—
Yet, if his needs conduct him where they sit
Smugly in office, judge this, bishop that,
Dispensers of the shine and shade o' the place—
And if, friend's door shut and friend's purse undrawn,
Still potentates may find the office-seat
Do as good service at no cost—give help
By-the-bye, pay up traditional dues at once
Just through a feather-weight too much i the scale,
Or finger-tip forgot at the balance tongue,—
Why, only churls refuse, or Molinists
Thus when, in the first roughness of surprise
At Guido's wolf-face whence the sheepskin fell,
The frightened couple, all bewilderment,
Rushed to the Governor,—who else rights wrong?
Told him their tale of wrong and craved redress—
Why, then the Governor woke up to the fact
That Guido was a friend of old, poor Count '—

So, promptly paid his tribute, promised the pair,
Wholesome chastisement should soon cure their qualms
Next time they came, wept, prated and told lies
So stopped all prating, sent them dumb to Rome
Well, now it was Pompilia's turn to try
The troubles pressing on her, as I said,
Three times she rushed, maddened by misery,
To the other mighty man, sobbed out her prayer
At footstool of the Archbishop—fast the friend
Of her husband also! Oh, good friends of yore!
So, the Archbishop, not to be outdone
By the Governor, break custom more than he,
Thrice bade the foolish woman stop her tongue,
Unloosed her hands from harassing his gout,
Coached her and carried her to the Count again,
—His old friend should be master in his house,
Rule his wife and correct her faults at need!
Well, driven from post to pillar in this wise,
She, as a last resource, betook herself
To one, should be no family-friend at least,
A simple friar o' the city, confessed to him,
Then told how fierce temptation of release
By self-dealt death was busy with her soul,
And urged that he put this in words, write plain
For one who could not write, set down her prayer
That Pietro and Violante, parent-like

If somehow not her parents, should for love
Come save her, pluck from out the flame the brand
Themselves had thoughtlessly thrust in so deep
To send gay-coloured sparkles up and cheer
Their seat at the chimney-corner The good friar
Promised as much at the moment, but, alack,
Night brings discretion he was no one's friend,
Yet presently found he could not turn about
Nor take a step i' the case and fail to tread
On someone's toe who either was a friend,
Or a friend's friend, or friend's friend thrice-removed
And woe to friar by whom offences come!
So, the course being plain,—with a general sigh
At matrimony the profound mistake, —
He threw reluctantly the business up,
Having his other penitents to mind

If then, all outlets thus secured save one,
At last she took to the open, stood and stared
With her wan face to see where God might wait—
And there found Caponsacchi wait as well
For the precious something at perdition's edge,
He only was predestinate to save,—
And if they recognized in a critical flash
From the zenith, each the other, her need of him,
His need of say, a woman to perish for,

The regular way o' the world, yet break no vow,
Do no harm save to himself,—if this were thus?
How do you say? It were improbable,
So is the legend of my patron-saint

Anyhow, whether, as Guido states the case,
Pompilia,—like a starving wretch i' the street
Who stops and rifles the first passenger
In the great right of an excessive wrong,—
Did somehow call this stranger and he came,—
Or whether the strange sudden interview
Blazed as when star and star must needs go close
Till each hurts each and there is loss in heaven—
Whatever way in this strange world it was,—
Pompilia and Caponsacchi met, in fine,
She at her window, he i' the street beneath,
And understood each other at first look

All was determined and performed at once
And on a certain April evening, late
I' the month, this girl of sixteen, bride and wife
Three years and over,—she who hitherto
Had never taken twenty steps in Rome
Beyond the church, pinned to her mother's gown,
Nor, in Arezzo, knew her way through street
Except what led to the Archbishop's door,—

Such an one rose up in the dark, laid hand
On what came first, clothes and a trinket or two,
Belongings of her own in the old day,—
Stole from the side o' the sleeping spouse—who knows?
Sleeping perhaps, silent for certain,—slid
Ghost-like from great dark room to great dark room
In through the tapestries and out again
And onward, unembarrassed as a fate,
Descended staircase, gained last door of all,
Sent it wide open at first push of palm,
And there stood, first time, last and only time,
At liberty, alone in the open street,—
Unquestioned, unmolested found herself
At the city gate, by Caponsacchi's side,
Hope there, joy there, life and all good again,
The carriage there, the convoy there, light there
Broadening ever into blaze at Rome
And breaking small what long miles lay between,
Up she sprang, in he followed, they were safe

The husband quotes this for incredible,
All of the story from first word to last
Sees the priest's hand throughout upholding hers,
Traces his foot to the alcove, that night,
Whither and whence blindfold he knew the way,
Proficient in all craft and stealthiness,

And cites for proof a servant, eye that watched
And ear that opened to purse secrets up,
A woman-spy,—suborned to give and take
Letters and tokens, do the work of shame
The more adroitly that herself, who helped
Communion thus between a tainted pair,
Had long since been a leper thick in spot,
A common trull o' the town she witnessed all,
Helped many meetings, partings, took her wage
And then told Guido the whole matter Lies!
The woman's life confutes her word,—her word
Confutes itself "Thus, thus and thus I lied"
"And thus, no question, still you lie," we say

"Ay but at last, e'en have it how you will,
"Whatever the means, whatever the way, explodes
"The consummation"—the accusers shriek
"Here is the wife avowedly found in flight,
"And the companion of her flight, a priest,
"She flies her husband, he the church his spouse
'What is this?"

Wife and priest alike reply
"This is the simple thing it claims to be,
"A course we took for life and honour's sake,
"Very strange, very justifiable"

he says, "God put it in my head to fly,
As when the martin migrates autumn claps
Her hands, cries 'Winter 's coming, will be here,
'Off with you ere the white teeth overtake!
'Flee!' So I fled this friend was the warm day,
The south wind and whatever favours flight,
I took the favour, had the help, how else?
And so we did fly rapidly all night,
All day, all night—a longer night—again,
And then another day, longest of days,
And all the while, whether we fled or stopped,
I scarce know how or why, one thought filled both,
'Fly and arrive!' So long as I found strength
I talked with my companion, told him much,
Knowing that he knew more, knew me, knew God
And God's disposal of me,—but the sense
O' the blessed flight absorbed me in the main,
And speech became mere talking through a sleep,
Till at the end of that last longest night
In a red daybreak, when we reached an inn
And my companion whispered 'Next stage—Rome!'
Sudden the weak flesh fell like piled-up cards,
All the frail fabric at a finger's touch,
And prostrate the poor soul too, and I said
'But though Count Guido were a furlong off,
'Just on me, I must stop and rest awhile!'

" Then something like a huge white wave o' the sea
" Broke o'er my brain and buried me in sleep
" Blessedly, till it ebbed and left me loose,
" And where was I found but on a strange bed
" In a strange room like hell, roaring with noise,
" Ruddy with flame, and filled with men, in front
" Who but the man you call my husband? ay—
" Count Guido once more between heaven and me,
" For there my heaven stood, my salvation, yes—
" That Caponsacchi all my heaven of help,
" Helpless himself, held prisoner in the hands
" Of men who looked up in my husband's face
" To take the fate thence he should signify,
" Just as the way was at Arezzo Then,
" Not for my sake but his who had helped me—
" I sprang up, reached him with one bound, and seized
" The sword o' the felon, trembling at his side,
' Fit creature of a coward, unsheathed the thing
" And would have pinned him through the poison-bag
" To the wall and left him there to palpitate,
" As you serve scorpions, but men interposed—
" Disarmed me, gave his life to him again
" That he might take mine and the other lives,
" And he has done so I submit myself!"
The priest says—oh, and in the main result
The facts asseverate, he truly says.

As to the very act and deed of him,
However you mistrust the mind o' the man—
The flight was just for flight's sake, no pretext
For aught except to set Pompilia free
He says "I cite the husband's self's worst charge
" In proof of my best word for both of us
" Be it conceded that so many times
" We took our pleasure in his palace then,
" What need to fly at all?—or flying no less,
" What need to outrage the lips sick and white
" Of a woman, and bring ruin down beside,
" By halting when Rome lay one stage beyond?"
So does he vindicate Pompilia's fame,
Confirm her story in all points but one—
This, that, so fleeing and so breathing forth
Her last strength in the prayer to halt awhile,
She makes confusion of the reddening white
Which was the sunset when her strength gave way,
And the next sunrise and its whitening red
Which she revived in when her husband came
She mixes both times, morn and eve, in one,
Having lived through a blank of night 'twixt each
Though dead asleep, unaware as a corpse,
She on the bed above, her friend below
Watched in the doorway of the inn the while,
Stood i' the red o' the morn, tnat she mistakes,

In act to rouse and quicken the tardy crew
And hurry out the horses, have the stage
Over, the last league, reach Rome and be safe
When up came Guido
Guido's tale begins—
How he and his whole household, drunk to death
By some enchanted potion, poppied drugs
Plied by the wife, lay powerless in gross sleep
And left the spoilers unimpeded way,
Could not shake off their poison and pursue,
Till noontide, then made shift to get on horse
And did pursue which means he took his time,
Pressed on no more than lingered after, step
By step, just making sure o' the fugitives,
Till at the nick of time, he saw his chance,
Seized it, came up with and surprised the pair
How he must needs have gnawn lip and gnashed teeth,
Taking successively at tower and town,
Village and roadside, still the same report
" Yes, such a pair arrived an hour ago,
" Sat in the carriage just where now you stand,
" While we got horses ready,—turned deaf ear
" To all entreaty they would even alight,
" Counted the minutes and resumed their course "
Would they indeed escape, arrive at Rome,
Leave no least loop-hole to let murder through,

But foil him of his captured infamy,
Prize of guilt proved and perfect? So it seemed
Till, oh the happy chance, at last stage, Rome
But two short hours off, Castelnuovo reached,
The guardian angel gave reluctant place,
Satan stepped forward with alacrity,
Pompilia's flesh and blood succumbed, perforce
A halt was, and her husband had his will
Perdue he couched, counted out hour by hour
Till he should spy in the east a signal streak—
Night had been, morrow was, triumph would be
Do you see the plan deliciously complete?
The rush upon the unsuspecting sleep,
The easy execution, the outcry
Over the deed "Take notice all the world!
"These two dead bodies, locked still in embrace,—
"The man is Caponsacchi and a priest,
"The woman is my wife I fled me late,
"Thus have I found and you behold them thus,
"And may judge me do you approve or no?"

Success did seem not so improbable,
But that already Satan's laugh was heard,
His black back turned on Guido—left i' the lurch
Or rather, baulked of suit and service now,
Left to improve on both by one deed more,

Burn up the better at no distant day,
Body and soul one holocaust to hell
Anyhow, of this natural consequence
Did just the last link of the long chain snap
For an eruption was o' the priest, alive
And alert, calm, resolute and formidable,
Not the least look of fear in that broad brow—
One not to be disposed of by surprise,
And armed moreover—who had guessed as much?
Yes, there stood he in secular costume
Complete from head to heel, with sword at side,
He seemed to know the trick of perfectly
There was no prompt suppression of the man
As he said calmly "I have saved your wife
"From death, there was no other way but this,
"Of what do I defraud you except death?
"Charge any wrong beyond, I answer it"
Guido, the valorous, had met his match,
Was forced to demand help instead of fight,
Bid the authorities o' the place lend aid
And make the best of a broken matter so
They soon obeyed the summons—I suppose,
Apprised and ready, or not far to seek—
Laid hands on Caponsacchi, found in fault,
A priest yet flagrantly accoutred thus,—
Then, to make good Count Guido's further charge,

Proceeded, prisoner made lead the way,
In a crowd, upstairs to the chamber-door
Where wax-white, dead asleep, deep beyond dream,
As the priest laid her, lay Pompilia yet

And as he mounted step and step with the crowd
How I see Guido taking heart again!
He knew his wife so well and the way of her—
How at the outbreak she would shroud her shame
In hell's heart, would it mercifully yawn—
How, failing that, her forehead to his foot,
She would crouch silent till the great doom fell,
Leave him triumphant with the crowd to see
Guilt motionless or writhing like a worm!
No! Second misadventure, this worm turned,
I told you would have slain him on the spot
With his own weapon, but they seized her hands
Leaving her tongue free, as it tolled the knell
Of Guido's hope so lively late The past
Took quite another shape now She who shrieked
"At least and for ever I am mine and God's,
"Thanks to his liberating angel Death—
"Never again degraded to be yours
"The ignoble noble, the unmanly man,
"The beast below the beast in brutishness!"—
This was the froward child, "the restif lamb

Used to be cherished in his breast," he groaned—
Eat from his hand and drink from out his cup,
The while his fingers pushed their loving way
Through curl on curl of that soft coat—alas,
And she all silverly baaed gratitude
While meditating mischief!"—and so forth
e must invent another story now!
he ins and outs o' the rooms were searched he found
r showed for found the abominable prize—
ove-letters from his wife who cannot write,
ove-letters in reply o' the priest—thank God!—
ho can write and confront his character
ith this, and prove the false thing forged throughout
itting whereat, he needs must spatter whom
it Guido's self?—that forged and falsified
ie letter called Pompilia's, past dispute
ien why not these to make sure still more sure?

was the case concluded then and there
ido preferred his charges in due form,
lled on the law to adjudicate, consigned
e accused ones to the Prefect of the place,
h mouse birth of that mountain-like revenge!)
d so to his own place betook himself

Investigation followed here i' the court—
Soon to review the fruit of its own work,
From then to now being eight months and no more
Guido kept out of sight and safe at home
The Abate, brother Paolo, helped most
At words when deeds were out of question, pushed
Nearest the purple, best played deputy,
So, pleaded, Guido's representative
At the court shall soon try Guido's self,—what 's more,
The court that also took—I told you, Sir—
That statement of the couple, how a cheat
Had been i' the birth of the babe, no child of theirs
That was the prelude, this, the play's first act
Whereof we wait what comes, crown, close of all

Well, the result was something of a shade
On the parties thus accused,—how otherwise?
Shade, but with shine as unmistakable
Each had a prompt defence Pompilia first—
"Earth was made hell to me who did no harm
"I only could emerge one way from hell
"By catching at the one hand held me, so
"I caught at it and thereby stepped to heaven
"If that be wrong, do with me what you will!"
Then Caponsacchi with a grave grand sweep

O' the arm as though his soul warned baseness off—
"If as a man, then much more as a priest
"I hold me bound to help weak innocence
"If so my worldly reputation burst,
'Being the bubble it is, why, burst it may
"Blame I can bear though not blameworthiness
"But use your sense first, see if the miscreant proved,
"The man who tortured thus the woman, thus
"Have not both laid the trap and fixed the lure
"Over the pit should bury body and soul!
'His facts are lies his letters are the fact—
"An infiltration flavoured with himself!
"As for the fancies—whether what is it you say?
"The lady loves me, whether I love her
"In the forbidden sense of your surmise,—
"If, with the midday blaze of truth above,
"The unlidded eye of God awake, aware,
"You needs must pry about and trace the birth
"Of each stray beam of light may traverse night
"To the night's sun that's Lucifer himself,
"Do so, at other time, in other place,
"Not now nor here! Enough that first to last
"I never touched her lip nor she my hand
"Nor either of us thought a thought, much less
"Spoke a word which the Virgin might not hear
"Be such your question, thus I answer it"

Then the court had to make its mind up, spoke
" It is a thorny question, yea, a tale
" Hard to believe, but not impossible
" Who can be absolute for either side?
" A middle course is happily open yet
" Here has a blot surprised the social blank,—
" Whether through favour, feebleness or fault,
" No matter, leprosy has touched our robe
" And we unclean must needs be purified
" Here is a wife makes holiday from home,
" A priest caught playing truant to his church,
" In masquerade moreover both allege
" Enough excuse to stop our lifted scourge
" Which else would heavily fall On the other hand,
" Here is a husband, ay and man of mark,
" Who comes complaining here, demands redress
" As if he were the pattern of desert—
" The while those plaguy allegations frown,
" Forbid we grant him the redress he seeks
" To all men be our moderation known!
" Rewarding none while compensating each,
" Hurting all round though harming nobody,
" Husband, wife, priest, scot-free not one shall 'scape,
" Yet priest, wife, husband, boast the unbroken head
" From application of our excellent oil
" So that, whatever be the fact, in fine,

" We make no miss of justice in a sort
" First, let the husband stomach as he may,
" His wife shall neither be returned him, no—
" Nor branded, whipped and caged, but just consigned
" To a convent and the quietude she craves,
" So is he rid of his domestic plague
" What better thing can happen to a man?
" Next, let the priest retire—unshent, unshamed,
" Unpunished as for perpetrating crime,
" But relegated (not imprisoned, Sirs!)
" Sent for three years to clarify his youth
" At Civita, a rest by the way to Rome
" There let his life skim off its last of lees
" Nor keep this dubious colour Judged the cause
" All parties may retire, content, we hope"
That 's Rome's way, the traditional road of law,
Whither it leads is what remains to tell

The priest went to his relegation-place,
The wife to her convent, brother Paolo
To the arms of brother Guido with the news
And this beside—his charge was countercharged,
The Comparini, his old brace of hates,
Were breathed and vigilant and venomous now—
Had shot a second bolt where the first stuck,
And followed up the pending dowry-suit

By a procedure should release the wife
From so much of the marriage-bond as barred
Escape when Guido turned the screw too much
On his wife's flesh and blood, as husband may
No more defence, she turned and made attack,
Claimed now divorce from bed and board, in short
Pleaded such subtle strokes of cruelty,
Such slow sure siege laid to her body and soul,
As, proved,—and proofs seemed coming thick and fast,—
Would gain both freedom and the dowry back
Even should the first suit leave them in his grasp
So urged the Comparini for the wife
Guido had gained not one of the good things
He grasped at by his creditable plan
O' the flight and following and the rest the suit
That smouldered late was fanned to fury new,
This adjunct came to help with fiercer fire,
While he had got himself a quite new plague—
Found the world's face an universal grin
At this last best of the Hundred Merry Tales
Of how a young and spritely clerk devised
To carry off a spouse that moped too much,
And cured her of the vapours in a trice
And how the husband, playing Vulcan's part,
Told by the Sun, started in hot pursuit
To catch the lovers, and came halting up,

Cast his net and then called the Gods to see
The convicts in their rosy impudence—
Whereat said Mercury "Would that I were Mars!"
On it was rare, and naughty all the same!
Brief, the wife's courage and cunning,—the priest's show
Of chivalry and adroitness,—last not least,
The husband—how he ne'er showed teeth at all,
Whose bark had promised biting, but just sneaked
Back to his kennel, tail 'twixt legs, as 't were,—
All this was hard to gulp down and digest
So pays the devil his liegeman, brass for gold
But this was at Arezzo here in Rome
Brave Paolo bore up against it all—
Battled it out, nor wanting to himself
Nor Guido nor the House whose weight he bore
Pillar-like, by no force of arm but brain
He knew his Rome, what wheels to set to work,
Plied influential folk, pressed to the ear
Of the efficacious purple, pushed his way
To the old Pope's self,—past decency indeed,—
Praying him take the matter in his hands
Out of the regular court's incompetence
But times are changed and nephews out of date
And favouritism unfashionable the Pope
Said "Render Cæsar what is Cæsar's due!"
As for the Comparini's counter-plea,

He met that by a counter-plea again,
Made Guido claim divorce—with help so far
By the trial's issue for, why punishment
However slight unless for guiltiness
However slender?—and a molehill serves
Much as a mountain of offence this way
So was he gathering strength on every side
And growing more and more to menace—when
All of a terrible moment came the blow
That beat down Paolo's fence, ended the play
O' the foil and brought mannaia on the stage

Five months had passed now since Pompilia's flight,
Months spent in peace among the Convert nuns
This,—being, as it seemed, for Guido's sake
Solely, what pride might call imprisonment
And quote as something gained, to friends at home,—
This naturally was at Guido's charge
Grudge it he might, but penitential fare,
Prayers, preachings, who but he defrayed the cost?
So, Paolo dropped, as proxy, doit by doit
Like heart's blood, till—what 's here? What notice comes?
The convent's self makes application bland
That, since Pompilia's health is fast o' the wane,
She may have leave to go combine her cure

Of soul with cure of body, mend her mind
Together with her thin arms and sunk eyes
That want fresh air outside the convent-wall,
Say in a friendly house,—and which so fit
As a certain villa in the Pauline way,
That happens to hold Pietro and his wife,
The natural guardians? "Oh, and shift the care
"You shift the cost, too, Pietro pays in turn,
"And lightens Guido of a load! And then,
"Villa or convent, two names for one thing,
"Always the sojourn means imprisonment,
"*Domus pro carcere*—nowise we relax,
"Nothing abate how answers Paolo?"
You,
What would you answer? All so smooth and fair,
Even Paul's astuteness sniffed no harm i' the world
He authorized the transfer, saw it made
And, two months after, reaped the fruit of the same,
Having to sit down, rack his brain and find
What phrase should serve him best to notify
Our Guido that by happy providence
A son and heir, a babe was born to him
I' the villa,—go tell sympathizing friends!
Yes, such had been Pompilia's privilege
She, when she fled, was one month gone with child,
Known to herself or unknown, either way

Availing to explain (say men of art)
The strange and passionate precipitance
Of maiden startled into motherhood
Which changes body and soul by nature's law
So when the she-dove breeds, strange yearnings come
For the unknown shelter by undreamed-of shores,
And there is born a blood-pulse in her heart
To fight if needs be, though with flap of wing,
For the wool-flock or the fur-tuft, though a hawk
Contest the prize,—wherefore, she knows not yet
Anyhow, thus to Guido came the news
"I shall have quitted Rome ere you arrive
"To take the one step left,"—wrote Paolo
Then did the winch o' the winepress of all hate,
Vanity, disappointment, grudge and greed,
Take the last turn that screws out pure revenge
With a bright bubble at the brim beside—
By an heir's birth he was assured at once
O' the main prize, all the money in dispute
Pompilia's dowry might revert to her
Or stay with him as law's caprice should point,—
But now—now—what was Pietro's shall be hers,
What was hers shall remain her own,—if hers,
Why then,—oh, not her husband's but—her heir's!
That heir being his too, all grew his at last
By this road or by that road, since they join

Before, why, push he Pietro out o' the world,—
The current of the money stopped, you see,
Pompilia being proved no Pietro's child
Or let it be Pompilia's life he quenched,
Again the current of the money stopped,—
Guido debarred his rights as husband soon,
So the new process threatened,—now, the chance,
Now, the resplendent minute! Clear the earth,
Cleanse the house, let the three but disappear
A child remains, depositary of all,
That Guido may enjoy his own again,
Repair all losses by a master-stroke,
Wipe out the past, all done all left undone,
Swell the good present to best evermore,
Die into new life, which let blood baptize!

So, i' the blue of a sudden sulphur-blaze,
Both why there was one step to take at Rome,
And why he should not meet with Paolo there,
He saw—the ins and outs to the heart of hell—
And took the straight line thither swift and sure
He rushed to Vittiano, found four sons o' the soil,
Brutes of his breeding, with one spark i' the clod
That served for a soul, the looking up to him
Or aught called Franceschini as life, death,
Heaven, hell,—lord paramount, assembled these,

Harangued, equipped, instructed, pressed each clod
With his will's imprint, then took horse, plied spur,
And so arrived, all five of them, at Rome
On Christmas-Eve, and forthwith found themselves
Installed i' the vacancy and solitude
Left them by Paolo, the considerate man
Who, good as his word, had disappeared at once
As if to leave the stage free A whole week
Did Guido spend in study of his part,
Then played it fearless of a failure One,
Struck the year's clock whereof the hours are days,
And off was rung o' the little wheels the chime
"Good will on earth and peace to man" but, two,
Proceeded the same bell and, evening come,
The dreadful five felt finger-wise their way
Across the town by blind cuts and black turns
To the little lone suburban villa, knocked—
"Who may be outside?" called a well-known voice
"A friend of Caponsacchi's bringing friends
"A letter"
That 's a test, the excusers say
Ay, and a test conclusive, I return
What? Had that name brought touch of guilt or tas
Of fear with it, aught to dash the present joy
With memory of the sorrow just at end,—
She, happy in her parents' arms at length

With the new blessing of the two weeks' babe,—
How had that name's announcement moved the wife?
Or, as the other slanders circulate,
Were Caponsacchi no rare visitant
On nights and days whither safe harbour lured,
What bait had been i' the name to ope the door?
The promise of a letter? Stealthy guests
Have secret watchwords, private entrances
The man's own self might have been found inside
And all the scheme made frustrate by a word
No but since Guido knew, none knew so well,
The man had never since returned to Rome
Nor seen the wife's face more than villa's front,
So, could not be at hand to warn or save,—
For that, he took this sure way to the end

"Come in," bade poor Violante cheerfully,
Drawing the door-bolt that death was the first,
Stabbed through and through Pietro, close on her heels,
Set up a cry—"Let me confess myself!
"Grant but confession!" Cold steel was the grant
Then came Pompilia's turn
Then they escaped
The noise o' the slaughter roused the neighbourhood
They had forgotten just the one thing more

Which saves i' the circumstance, the ticket to-wit
Which puts post-horses at a traveller's use
So, all on foot, desperate through the dark
Reeled they like drunkards along open road,
Accomplished a prodigious twenty miles
Homeward, and gained Baccano very near,
Stumbled at last, deaf, dumb, blind through the feat,
Into a grange and, one dead heap, slept there
Till the pursuers hard upon their trace
Reached them and took them, red from head to heel,
And brought them to the prison where they lie
The couple were laid i' the church two days ago,
And the wife lives yet by miracle

All is told
You hardly need ask what Count Gu do says,
Since something he must say "I own the deed—"
(He cannot choose,—but—) "I declare the same
"Just and inevitable,—since no way else
"Was left me, but by this of taking life,
"To save my honour which is more than life
"I exercised a husband's rights" To which
The answer is as prompt—"There was no fault
"In any one o' the three to punish thus
"Neither i' the wife, who kept all faith to you,
"Nor in the parents, whom yourself first duped,

" Robbed and maltreated, then turned out of doors
" You wronged and they endured wrong, yours the fault
Next, had endurance overpassed the mark
' And turned resentment needing remedy,—
" Nay, put the absurd impossible case, for once—
" You were all blameless of the blame alleged
" And they blameworthy where you fix all blame,
" Still, why this violation of the law?
" Yourself elected law should take its course,
" Avenge wrong, or show vengeance not your right,
" Why, only when the balance in law's hand
" Trembles against you and inclines the way
" O' the other party, do you make protest,
" Renounce arbitrament, flying out of court,
" And crying ' Honour's hurt the sword must cure '?
" Aha, and so i' the middle of each suit
" Trying i' the courts,—and you had three in play
" With an appeal to the Pope's self beside,—
" What, you may chop and change and right your wrongs
" Leaving the law to lag as she thinks fit?"

That were too temptingly commodious, Count!
One would have still a remedy in reserve
Should reach the safest oldest sinner, you see!
One's honour forsooth? Does that take hurt alone

From the extreme outrage? I who have no wife,
Being yet sensitive in my degree
As Guido,—must discover hurt elsewhere
Which, half compounded-for in days gone by,
May profitably break out now afresh,
Need cure from my own expeditious hands
The lie that was as it were, imputed me
When you objected to my contract's clause,—
The theft as good as, one may say, alleged,
When you, co-heir in a will, excepted, Sir,
To my administration of effects,
—Aha, do you think law disposed of these?
My honour 's touched and shall deal death around!
Count, that were too commodious, I repeat!
If any law be imperative on us all,
Of all are you the enemy: out with you
From the common light and air and life of man!

IV

TERTIUM QUID

TRUE, Excellency—as his Highness says,
Though she 's not dead yet, she 's as good as stretched
Symmetrical beside the other two,
Though he 's not judged yet, he 's the same as judged,
So do the facts abound and superabound
And nothing hinders that we lift the case
Out of the shade into the shine, allow
Qualified persons to pronounce at last,
Nay, edge in an authoritative word
Between this rabble's-brabble of dolts and fools
Who make up reasonless unreasoning Rome
"Now for the Trial!" they roar "the Trial to test
"The truth, weigh husband and weigh wife alike
"I' the scales of law, make one scale kick the beam!"
Law 's a machine from which, to please the mob,
Truth the divinity must needs descend
And clear things at the play's fifth act—aha!
Hammer into their noddles who was who

And what was what I tell the simpletons
"Could law be competent to such a feat
"'T were done already what begins next week
"Is end o' the Trial, last link of a chain
"Whereof the first was forged three years ago
"When law addressed herself to set wrong right,
"And proved so slow in taking the first step
"That ever some new grievance,—tort, retort,
"On one or the other side,—o'ertook i' the game,
"Retarded sentence, till this deed of death
"Is thrown in, as it were, last bale to boat
"Crammed to the edge with cargo—or passengers?
"'*Trecentos inseris ohe, jam satis est!*
"'*Huc appelle!*'—passengers, the word must be"
Long since, the boat was loaded to my eyes
To hear the rabble and brabble, you 'd call the case
Fused and confused past human finding out
One calls the square round, t' other the round square—
And pardonably in that first surprise
O' the blood that fell and splashed the diagram
But now we' ve used our eyes to the violent hue
Can't we look through the crimson and trace lines?
It makes a man despair of history,
Eusebius and the established fact—fig's end!
Oh, give the fools their Trial, rattle away
With the leash of lawyers, two on either side—

One barks, one bites,—Masters Arcangeli
And Spreti,—that 's the husband's ultimate hope
Against the Fisc and the other kind of Fisc,
Bound to do barking for the wife bow—wow!
Why, Excellency, we and his Highness here
Would settle the matter as sufficiently
As ever will Advocate This and Fiscal That
And Judge the Other, with even—a word and a wink—
We well know who for ultimate arbiter
Let us beware o' the basset-table—lest
We jog the elbow of Her Eminence,
Jostle his cards,—he 'll rap you out a st!
By the window-seat! And here 's the Marquis too!
Indulge me but a moment if I fail
—Favoured with such an audience, understand!—
To set things right, why, class me with the mob
As understander of the mind of man!

The mob,—now, that 's just how the error comes!
Bethink you that you have to deal with *plebs*,
The commonalty, this is an episode
In burgess life,—why seek to aggrandize,
Idealize, denaturalize the class?
People talk just as if they had to do
With a noble pair that Excellency, your ear!
Stoop to me, Highness,—listen and look yourselves!

This Pietro this Violante, live their life
At Rome in the easy way that 's far from worst
Even for their betters,—themselves love themselves,
Spend their own oil in feeding their own lamp
That their own faces may grow bright thereby
They get to fifty and over how 's the lamp?
Full to the depth o' the wick,—moneys so much,
And also with a remnant,—so much more
Of moneys,—which there 's no consuming now,
But, when the wick shall moulder out some day,
Failing fresh twist of tow to use up dregs,
Will lie a prize for the passer-by,—to-wit
Anyone that can prove himself the heir,
Seeing, the couple are wanting in a child
Meantime their wick swims in the safe broad bowl
O' the middle rank,—not raised a beacon's height
For wind to ravage, nor dropped till lamp graze ground
Like cresset, mudlarks poke now here now there,
Going their rounds to probe the ruts i' the road
Or fish the luck o' the puddle Pietro's soul
Was satisfied when cronies smirked, "No wine
"Like Pietro's, and he drinks it every day!"
His wife's heart swelled her boddice, joyed its fill
When neighbours turned heads wistfully at church,
Sighed at the load of lace that came to pray
Well, having got through fifty years of flare,

They burn out so, indulge so their dear selves,
That Pietro finds himself in debt at last,
As he were any lordling of us all
And, now that dark begins to creep on day,
Creditors grow uneasy, talk aside,
Take counsel, then importune all at once.
For if the good fat rosy careless man,
Who has not laid a ducat by, decease—
Let the lamp fall, no heir at hand to catch—
Why, being childless, there 's a spilth i' the street
O' the remnant, there 's a scramble for the dregs
By the stranger so, they grant him no long day
But come in a body, clamour to be paid

What 's his resource? He asks and straight obtains
The customary largess, dole dealt out
To, what we call our "poor dear shame-faced ones,"
In secret once a month to spare the shame
O' the slothful and the spendthrift,—pauper saints
The Pope puts meat i' the mouth of, ravens they,
And providence he—just what the mob admires!
That is, instead of putting a prompt foot
On selfish worthless human slugs whose slime
Has failed to lubricate their path in life,
Why, the Pope picks the first ripe fruit that falls
And gracious puts it in the vermin's way

Pietro could never save a dollar? Straight
He must be subsidized at our expense
And for his wife—the harmless household sheep
One ought not to see harassed in her age—
Judge, by the way she bore adversity,
O' the patient nature you ask pity for!
How long, now, would the roughest marketman,
Handling the creatures huddled to the knife,
Harass a mutton ere she made a mouth
Or menaced biting? Yet the poor sheep here,
Violante, the old innocent burgess-wife,
In her first difficulty showed great teeth
Fit to crunch up and swallow a good round crime
She meditates the tenure of the Trust,
Fidei commissum is the lawyer-phrase,
These funds that only want an heir to take—
Goes o'er the gamut o' the creditor's cry
By semitones from whine to snarl high up
And growl down low, one scale in sundry keys,—
Pauses with a little compunction for the face
Of Pietro frustrate of its ancient cheer,—
Never a bottle now for friend at need,—
Comes to a stop on her own frittered lace
And neighbourly condolences thereat,
Then makes her mind up, sees the thing to do
And so, deliberate, snaps house-book clasp,

Posts off to vespers, missal beneath arm,
Passes the proper San Lorenzo by,
Dives down a little lane to the left, is lost
In a labyrinth of dwellings best unnamed,
Selects a certain blind one, black at base,
Blinking at top,—the sign of we know what,—
One candle in a casement set to wink
Streetward, do service to no shrine inside,—
Mounts thither by the filthy flight of stairs,
Holding the cord by the wall, to the tip-top,
Gropes for the door i' the dark, ajar of course,
Raps, opens, enters in up starts a thing
Naked as needs be—"What, you rogue, 't is you?
"Back,—how can I have taken a farthing yet?
"Mercy on me, poor sinner that I am!
"Here 's why, I took you for Madonna's self
"With all that sudden swirl of silk i' the place!
"What may your pleasure be, my bonny dame?"
Your Excellency supplies aught left obscure?
One of those women that abound in Rome,
Whose needs oblige them eke out one poor trade
By another vile one her ostensible work
Was washing clothes, out in the open air
At the cistern by Citorio, her true trade—
Whispering to idlers, when they stopped and praised
The ankles she let liberally shine

In kneeling at the slab by the fountain-side,
That there was plenty more to criticize
At home, that eve, i' the house where candle blinked
Decorously above, and all was done
I' the holy fear of God and cheap beside
Violante, now, had seen this woman wash,
Noticed and envied her propitious shape,
Tracked her home to her house top, noted too,
And now was come to tempt her and propose
A bargain far more shameful than the first
Which trafficked her virginity away
For a melon and three pauls at twelve years old.
Five minutes' talk with this poor child of Eve,
Struck was the bargain, business at an end—
"Then, six months hence, that person whom you trust,
"Comes, fetches whatsoever babe it be,
"I keep the price and secret, you the babe,
"Paying beside for mass to make all straight·
"Meantime, I pouch the earnest-money-piece"

Down stairs again goes fumbling by the rope
Violante, triumphing in a flourish of fire
From her own brain, self-lit by such success,—
Gains church in time for the "*Magnificat*"
And gives forth "My reproof is taken away,
"And blessed shall mankind proclaim me now,"

So that the officiating priest turns round
To see who proffers the obstreperous praise
Then home to Pietro, the enraptured-much
But puzzled-more when told the wondrous news—
How orisons and works of charity,
(Beside that pair of pinners and a coif,
Birth-day surprise last Wednesday was five weeks)
Had borne fruit in the autumn of his life,—
They, or the Orvieto in a double dose
Anyhow, she must keep house next six months,
Lie on the settle, avoid the three-legged stool,
And, chiefly, not be crossed in wish or whim,
And the result was like to be an heir

Accordingly, when time was come about,
He found himself the sire indeed of this
Francesca Vittoria Pompilia and the rest
O' the names whereby he sealed her his, next day
A crime complete in its way is here, I hope?
Lies to God, lies to man, every way lies
To nature and civility and the mode
Flat robbery of the proper heirs thus foiled
O' the due succession,—and, what followed thence,
Robbery of God, through the confessor's ear
Debarred the most note-worthy incident
When all else done and undone twelve month through

Was put in evidence at Easter-time
All other peccadillos!—but this one
To the priest who comes next day to dine with us?
'T were inexpedient, decency forbade

Is so far clear? You know Violante now,
Compute her capability of crime
By this authentic instance? Black hard cold
Crime like a stone you kick up with your foot
I' the middle of a field?

I thought as much
But now, a question,—how long does it lie,
The bad and barren bit of stuff you kick,
Before encroached on and encompassed round
With minute moss, weed, wild-flower—made alive
By worm, and fly, and foot of the free bird?
Your Highness,—healthy minds let bygones be,
Leave old crimes to grow young and virtuous-like
I' the sun and air, so time treats ugly deeds
They take the natural blessing of all change
There was the joy o' the husband silly-sooth,
The softening of the wife's old wicked heart,
Virtues to right and left, profusely paid
If so they might compensate the saved sin
And then the sudden existence, dewy dear,

O' the rose above the dungheap, the pure child
As good as new created, since withdrawn
From the horror of the pre-appointed lot
With the unknown father and the mother known
Too well,—some fourteen years of squalid youth,
And then libertinage, disease, the grave—
Hell in life here, hereafter life in hell
Look at that horror and this soft repose!
Why, moralist, the sin has saved a soul!
Then, even the palpable grievance to the heirs—
'Faith, this was no frank setting hand to throat
And robbing a man, but Excellency, by your leave,
How did you get that marvel of a gem,
The sapphire with the Graces grand and Greek?
The story is, stooping to pick a stone
From the pathway through a vineyard—no-man's-land—
To pelt a sparrow with, you chanced on this
Why now, do those five clowns o' the family
O' the vinedresser digest their porridge worse
That not one keeps it in his goatskin pouch
To do flint's-service with the tinder-box?
Don't cheat me, don't cheat you, don't cheat a friend,
But are you so hard on who jostles just
A stranger with no natural sort of claim
To the havings and the holdings (here 's the point)
Unless by misadventure, and defect

Of that which ought to be—nay, which there 's none
Would dare so much as wish to profit by—
Since who dares put in just so many words
"May Pietro fail to have a child, please God!
"So shall his house and goods belong to me,
"The sooner that his heart will pine betimes"?
Well then, God doesn't please, nor heart shall pine!
Because he has a child at last, you see,
Or selfsame thing as though a child it were,
He thinks, whose sole concern it is to think
If he accepts it why should you demur?

Moreover, say that certain sin there seem,
The proper process of unsinning sin
Is to begin well-doing somehow else
Pietro,—remember, with no sin at all
I' the substitution,—why, this gift of God
Flung in his lap from over Paradise
Steadied him in a moment, set him straight
On the good path he had been straying from
Henceforward no more wilfulness and waste,
Cuppings, carousings,—these a sponge wiped out
All sort of self-denial was easy now
For the child's sake, the chatelaine to be,
Who must want much and might want who knows what?
And so, the debts were paid, habits reformed,

Expense curtailed, the dowry set to grow
As for the wife,—I said, hers the whole sin
So, hers the exemplary penance 'T was a text
Whereon folk preached and praised, the district through
"Oh, make us happy and you make us good!
"It all comes of God giving her a child
"Such graces follow God's best earthly gift!"

Here you put by my guard, pass to my heart
By the home thrust—"There 's a lie at base of all"
Why, thou exact Prince, is it a pearl or no,
Yon globe upon the Principessa's neck?
That great round glory of pellucid stuff,
A fish secreted round a grain of grit!
Do you call it worthless for the worthless core?
(She doesn't, who well knows what she changed for it)
So, to our brace of burgesses again!
You see so far i' the story, who was right,
Who wrong, who neither, don't you? What, you don't?
Eh? Well, admit there 's somewhat dark i' the case,
Let 's on—the rest shall clear, I promise you
Leap over a dozen years you find, these past,
An old good easy creditable sire,
A careful housewife's beaming bustling face,
Both wrapped up in the love of their one child,
The strange tall pale beautiful creature grown

Lily-like out o' the cleft i' the sun-smit rock
To bow its white miraculous birth of buds
I' the way of wandering Joseph and his spouse,—
So painters fancy here it was a fact
And this their lily,—could they but transplant
And set in vase to stand by Solomon's porch
'Twixt lion and lion!—this Pompilia of theirs,
Could they see worthily married, well bestowed,
In house and home! And why despair of this
With Rome to choose from, save the topmost rank?
Themselves would help the choice with heart and soul,
Throw their late savings in a common heap
To go with the dowry, and be followed in time
By the heritage legitimately hers
And when such paragon was found and fixed,
Why, they might chant their "*Nunc dimittis*" straight

Indeed the prize was simply full to a fault,
Exorbitant for the suitor they should seek,
And social class should choose among, these cits
Yet there 's a latitude exceptional white
Amid the general brown o' the species, lurks
A burgess nearly an aristocrat,
Legitimately in reach look out for him!
What banker, merchant, has seen better days,
What second-rate painter a-pushing up.

Poet a slipping down, shall bid the best
For this young beauty with the thumping purse?
Alack, were it but one of such as these
So like the real thing that they pass for it,
All had gone well! Unluckily, poor souls,
It proved to be the impossible thing itself,
Truth and not sham hence ruin to them all

For, Guido Franceschini was the head
Of an old family in Arezzo, old
To that degree they could afford be poor
Better than most the case is common too
Out of the vast door 'scutcheoned overhead,
Creeps out a serving-man on Saturdays
To cater for the week,—turns up anon
I' the market, chaffering for the lamb's least leg,
Or the quarter-fowl, less entrails, claws and comb
Then back again with prize,—a liver begged
Into the bargain, gizzard overlooked
He 's mincing these to give the beans a taste,
When, at your knock, he leaves the simmering soup,
Waits on the curious stranger-visitant,
Napkin in half-wiped hand, to show the rooms,
Point pictures out have hung their hundred years,
"Priceless," he tells you,—puts in his place at once
The man of money yes, you 're banker-king

Or merchant-kaiser, wallow in your wealth
While patron, the house-master, can't afford
To stop our ceiling-hole that rain so rots
But he 's the man of mark, and there 's his shield,
And yonder 's the famed Rafael, first in kind,
The painter painted for his grandfather,
And you have paid to see "Good morning, Sir!"
Such is the law of compensation Still
The poverty was getting nigh acute,
There gaped so many noble mouths to feed,
Beans must suffice unflavoured of the fowl
The mother,—hers would be a spun-out life
I' the nature of things, the sisters had done well
And married men of reasonable rank
But that sort of illumination stops,
Throws back no heat upon the parent-hearth
The family instinct felt out for its fire
To the Church,—the Church traditionally helps
A second son and such was Paolo,
Established here at Rome these thirty years,
Who played the regular game,—priest and Abate,
Made friends, owned house and land, became of use
To a personage his course lay clear enough
The youngest caught the sympathetic flame,
And, though unfledged wings kept him still i' the cage,
Yet he shot up to be a Canon, so

Clung to the higher perch and crowed in hope
Even our Guido, eldest brother, went
As far i' the way o' the Church as safety seemed,
He being Head o' the House, ordained to wive,—
So, could but dally with an Order or two
And testify good-will i' the cause he clipped
His top-hair and thus far affected Christ
But main promotion must fall otherwise,
Though still from the side o' the Church and here was he
At Rome, since first youth, worn threadbare of soul
By forty-six years' rubbing on hard life,
Getting fast tired o' the game whose word is—"Wait!"
When one day,—he too having his Cardinal
To serve in some ambiguous sort, as serve
To draw the coach the plumes o' the horses' heads,—
The Cardinal saw fit to dispense with him,
Ride with one plume the less, and off it dropped

Guido thus left,—with a youth spent in vain
And not a penny in purse to show for it,—
Advised with Paolo, bent no doubt in chafe
The black brows somewhat formidably, growled
"Where is the good I came to get at Rome?
"Where the repayment of the servitude
"To a purple popinjay, whose feet I kiss,
"Knowing his father wiped the shoes of mine?"

"Patience," pats Paolo the recalcitrant—
"You have not had, so far, the proper luck,
"Nor do my gains suffice to keep us both
"A modest competency is mine, not more
"You are the Count however, yours the style,
"Heirdom and state,—you can't expect all good
"Had I, now, held your hand of cards well, well—
"What 's yet unplayed, I 'll look at, by your leave,
"Over your shoulder,—I who made my game,
"Let 's see, if I can't help to handle yours
"Fie on you, all the Honours in your fist,
"Countship, Householdship,—how have you misdealt!
"Why, in the first place, these will marry a man!
"*Notum tonsoribus!* To the Tonsor then!
"Come, clear your looks, and choose your freshest suit,
"And, after function 's done with, down we go
"To the woman-dealer in perukes, a wench
"I and some others settled in the shop
"At Place Colonna she 's an oracle Hmm!
"'Dear, 't is my brother brother, 't is my dear
"'Dear, give us counsel! Whom do you suggest
"'As properest party in the quarter round
"'For the Count here?—he is minded to take wife,
"'And further tells me he intends to slip
"'Twenty zecchines under the bottom-scalp
"'Of his old wig when he sends it to revive

" 'For the wedding and I add a trifle too
" 'You know what personage I 'm potent with' "
And so plumped out Pompilia's name the first
She told them of the household and its ways,
The easy husband and the shrewder wife
In Via Vittoria,—how the tall young girl,
With hair black as yon patch and eyes as big
As yon pomander to make freckles fly,
Would have so much for certain, and so much more
In likelihood,—why, it suited, slipped as smooth
As the Pope's pantoufle does on the Pope's foot
" I 'll to the husband !" Guido ups and cries
" Ay, so you 'd play your last court-card, no doubt !"
Puts Paolo in with a groan—" Only, you see,
" 'T is I, this time, that supervise your lead
" Priests play with women, maids, wives, mothers—
why?
" These play with men and take them off our hands
" Did I come, counsel with some cut-beard gruff
" Or rather this sleek young-old barberess?
" Go, brother, stand you rapt in the ante-room
" Of Her Efficacity my Cardinal
" For an hour,—he likes to have lord-suitors lounge,—
" While I betake myself to the grey mare,
" The better horse,—how wise the people's word !—
" And wait on Madam Violante "

Said and done
He was at Via Vittoria in three skips
Proposed at once to fill up the one want
O' the burgess family which, wealthy enough,
And comfortable to heart's desire, yet crouched
Outside a gate to heaven,—locked, bolted, barred,
Whereof Count Guido had a key he kept
Under his pillow, but Pompilia's hand
Might slide behind his neck and pilfer thence
The key was fairy, its mere mention made
Violante feel the thing shoot one sharp ray
That reached the womanly heart so—"I assent!
"Yours be Pompilia, hers and ours that key
"To all the glories of the greater life!
"There 's Pietro to convince leave that to me!"

Then was the matter broached to Pietro, then
Did Pietro make demand and get response
That in the Countship was a truth, but in
The counting up of the Count's cash, a lie
He thereupon stroked grave his chin, looked great,
Declined the honour Then the wife wiped tear,
Winked with the other eye turned Paolo-ward,
Whispered Pompilia, stole to church at eve,
Found Guido there and got the marriage done,
And finally begged pardon at the feet

Of her dear lord and master Whereupon
Quoth Pietro—"Let us make the best of things!"
"I knew your love would license us," quoth she
Quoth Paolo once more, "Mothers, wives and maids,
"These be the tools wherewith priests manage men"

Now, here take breath and ask,—which bird o' the brace
Decoyed the other into clapnet? Who
Was fool, who knave? Neither and both, perchance
There was a bargain mentally proposed
On each side, straight and plain and fair enough,
Mind knew its own mind but when mind must speak,
The bargain have expression in plain terms,
There came the blunder incident to words,
And in the clumsy process, fair turned foul
The straight backbone-thought of the crooked speech
Were just—"I Guido truck my name and rank
"For so much money and youth and female charms—
'We Pietro and Violante give our child
"And wealth to you for a rise i' the world thereby."
Such naked truth while chambered in the brain
Shocks nowise walk it forth by way of tongue,—
Out on the cynical unseemliness!
Hence was the need, on either side, of a lie
To serve as decent wrappage so, Guido gives
Money for money,—and they, bride for groom,

Having, he, not a doit, they, not a child
Honestly theirs, but this poor waif and stray
According to the words, each cheated each,
But in the inexpressive barter of thoughts,
Each did give and did take the thing designed,
The rank on this side and the cash on that—
Attained the object of the traffic, so
The way of the world, the daily bargain struck
In the first market! Why sells Jack his ware?
"For the sake of serving an old customer"
Why does Jill buy it? "Simply not to break
"A custom, pass the old stall the first time"
Why, you know where the gist is of the exchange
Each sees a profit, throws the fine words in
Don't be too hard o' the pair! Had each pretence
Been simultaneously discovered, stript
From off the body o' the transaction, just
As when a cook (will Excellency forgive?)
Strips away those long rough superfluous legs
From either side the crayfish, leaving folk
A meal all meat henceforth, no garnishry,
(With your respect, Prince!)—balance had been kept,
No party blamed the other,—so, starting fair,
All subsequent fence of wrong returned by wrong
I' the matrimonial thrust and parry, at least
Had followed on equal terms But, as it chanced,

One party had the advantage, saw the cheat
Of the other first and kept its own concealed
And the luck o' the first discovery fell, beside,
To the least adroit and self-possessed o' the pair
'T was foolish Pietro and his wife saw first
The nobleman was penniless, and screamed
" We are cheated ! "

Such unprofitable noise
Angers at all times but when those who plague,
Do it from inside your own house and home,
Gnats which yourself have closed the curtain round,
Noise goes too near the brain and makes you mad
The gnats say, Guido used the candle-flame
Unfairly,—worsened that first bad of his,
By practising all kinds of cruelty
To oust them and suppress the wail and whine,—
That speedily he so scared and bullied them,
Fain were they, long before five months had passed,
To beg him grant, from what was once their wealth,
Just so much as would help them back to Rome
Where, when they finished paying the last doit
O' the dowry, they might beg from door to door
So say the Comparini—as if it came
Of pure resentment for this worse than bad,
That then Violante, feeling conscience prick,

Confessed her substitution of the child
Whence all the harm fell,—and that Pietro first
Bethought him of advantage to himself
I' the deed, as part revenge, part remedy
For all miscalculation in the pact

On the other hand "Not so!" Guido retorts—
"I am the wronged, solely, from first to last,
"Who gave the dignity I engaged to give,
"Which was, is, cannot but continue gain
"My being poor was a bye-circumstance,
"Miscalculated piece of untowardness,
"Might end to-morrow did heaven's windows ope,
"Or uncle die and leave me his estate
"You should have put up with the minor flaw,
"Getting the main prize of the jewel If wealth,
"Not rank, had been prime object in your thoughts,
"Why not have taken the butcher's son, the boy
"O' the baker or candlestick-maker? In all the rest,
"It was yourselves broke compact and played false,
"And made a life in common impossible
"Show me the stipulation of our bond
"That you should make your profit of being inside
"My house, to hustle and edge me out o' the same,
"First make a laughing-stock of mine and me,
"Then round us in the ears from morn to night

" (Because we show wry faces at your mirth)
" That you are robbed, starved, beaten and what not!
" You fled a hell of your own lighting-up,
" Pay for your own miscalculation too
" You thought nobility, gained at any price,
" Would suit and satisfy,—find the mistake,
" And now retaliate, not on yourselves, but me
" And how? By telling me, i' the face of the world,
" I it is have been cheated all this while,
" Abominably and irreparably,—my name
" Given to a cur-cast mongrel, a drab's brat,
" A beggar's bye blow,—thus depriving me
' Of what yourselves allege the whole and sole
' Aim on my part i' the marriage,—money to-wit
" This thrust I have to parry by a guard
" Which leaves me open to a counter-thrust
" On the other side,—no way but there 's a pass
' Clean through me If I prove, as I hope to do,
" There 's not one truth in this your odious tale
" O' the buying, selling, substituting—prove
' Your daughter was and is your daughter,—well,
" And her dowry hers and therefore mine,—what then?
" Why, where 's the appropriate punishment for this
" Enormous lie hatched for mere malice' sake
" To ruin me? Is that a wrong or no?

" And if I try revenge for remedy,
" Can I well make it strong and bitter enough?"

I anticipate however—only ask,
Which of the two here sinned most? A nice point!
Which brownness is least black,—decide who can,
Wager-by-battle-of-cheating! What do you say,
Highness? Suppose, your Excellency, we leave
The question at this stage, proceed to the next,
Both parties step out, fight their prize upon,
In the eye o' the world?
They brandish law 'gainst law,
The grinding of such blades, each parry of each,
Throws terrible sparks off, over and above the thrusts,
And makes more sinister the fight, to the eye,
Than the very wounds that follow Beside the tale
Which the Comparini have to re-assert,
They needs must write, print, publish all abroad
The straitnesses of Guido's household life—
The petty nothings we bear privately
But break down under when fools flock to jeer
What is it all to the facts o' the couple's case,
How helps it prove Pompilia not their child,
If Guido's mother, brother, kith and kin
Fare ill, lie hard, lack clothes, lack fire, lack food?
That's one more wrong than needs

On the other hand,
Guido,—whose cue is to dispute the truth
O' the tale, reject the shame it throws on him,—
He may retaliate, fight his foe in turn
And welcome, we allow Ay, but he can't!
He 's at home, only acts by proxy here
Law may meet law,—but all the gibes and jeers,
The superfluity of naughtiness,
Those libels on his House,—how reach at them?
Two hateful faces, grinning all a-glow,
Not only make parade of spoil they filched,
But foul him from the height of a tower, you see
Unluckily temptation is at hand—
To take revenge on a trifle overlooked,
A pet lamb they have left in reach outside,
Whose first bleat, when he plucks the wool away,
Will strike the grinners grave his wife remains
Who, four months earlier, some thirteen years old,
Never a mile away from mother's house
And petted to the height of her desire,
Was told one morning that her fate had come,
She must be married—just as, a month before,
Her mother told her she must comb her hair
And twist her curls into one knot behind
These fools forgot their pet lamb, fed with flowers,
Then 'ticed as usual by the bit of cake

Out of the bower into the butchery
Plague her, he plagues them threefold but how plague?
The world may have its word to say to that
You can't do some things with impunity
What remains well, it is an ugly thought
But that he drive herself to plague herself—
Herself disgrace herself and so disgrace
Who seek to disgrace Guido?

There 's the clue
To what else seems gratuitously vile,
If, as is said, from this time forth the rack
Was tried upon Pompilia 't was to wrench
Her limbs into exposure that brings shame
The aim o' the cruelty being so crueller still,
That cruelty almost grows compassion's self
Could one attribute it to mere return
O' the parents' outrage, wrong avenging wrong
They see in this a deeper deadlier aim,
Not to vex just a body they held dear,
But blacken too a soul they boasted white,
And show the world their saint in a lover's arms,
No matter how driven thither,—so they say

On the other hand, so much is easily said,
And Guido lacks not an apologist

The pair had nobody but themselves to blame,
Being selfish beasts throughout, no less, no more
—Cared for themselves, their supposed good, nought else,
And brought about the marriage, good proved bad,
As little they cared for her its victim—nay,
Meant she should stay behind and take the chance,
If haply they might wriggle themselves free
They baited their own hook to catch a fish
With this poor worm, failed o' the prize, and then
Sought how to unbait tackle, let worm float
Or sink, amuse the monster while they 'scaped
Under the best stars Hymen brings above,
Had all been honesty on either side,
A common sincere effort to good end,
Still, this would prove a difficult problem, Prince!
—Given, a fair wife, aged thirteen years,
A husband poor, care-bitten, sorrow-sunk,
Little, long-nosed, bush-bearded, lantern-jawed,
Forty-six years old,—place the two grown one,
She, cut off sheer from every natural aid,
In a strange town with no familiar face—
He, in his own parade-ground or retreat
If need were, free from challenge, much less check
To an irritated, disappointed will—
How evolve happiness from such a match?

T were hard to serve up a congenial dish
Out of these ill-agreeing morsels, Duke,
By the best exercise of the cook's craft,
Best interspersion of spice, salt and sweet!
But let two ghastly scullions concoct mess
With brimstone, pitch, vitriol and devil's-dung—
Throw in abuse o' the man, his body and soul,
Kith, kin and generation shake all slab
At Rome, Arezzo, for the world to nose,
Then end by publishing, for fiend's arch-prank,
That, over and above sauce to the meat's self,
Why, even the meat, bedevilled thus in dish,
Was never a pheasant but a carrion-crow—
Prince, what will then the natural loathing be?
What wonder if this?—the compound plague o' the pair
Pricked Guido,—not to take the course they hoped,
That is, submit him to their statement's truth,
Accept its obvious promise of relief,
And thrust them out of doors the girl again
Since the girl's dowry would not enter there,
—Quit of the one if baulked of the other no!
Rather did rage and hate so work in him,
Their product proved the horrible conceit
That he should plot and plan and bring to pass
His wife might, of her own free will and deed,
Relieve him of her presence, get her gone,

And yet leave all the dowry safe behind,
Confirmed his own henceforward past dispute,
While blotting out, as by a belch of hell,
Their triumph in her misery and death

You see, the man was Aretine, had touch
O' the subtle air that breeds the subtle wit,
Was noble too, of old blood thrice-refined
That shrinks from clownish coarseness in disgust
Allow that such an one may take revenge,
You don't expect he 'll catch up stone and fling,
Or try cross-buttock, or whirl quarter-staff?
Instead of the honest drubbing clowns bestow,
When out of temper at the dinner spoilt,
On meddling mother-in-law and tiresome wife,—
Substitute for the clown a nobleman,
And you have Guido, practising, 't is said,
Immitigably from the very first,
The finer vengeance this, they say, the fact
O' the famous letter shows—the writing traced
At Guido's instance by the timid wife
Over the pencilled words himself writ first--
Wherein she, who could neither write nor read,
Was made unblushingly declare a tale
To the brother, the Abate then in Rome,
How her putative parents had impressed,

On their departure, their enjoinment, bade
"We being safely arrived here, follow, you!
"Poison your husband, rob, set fire to all,
"And then by means o' the gallant you procure
"With ease, by helpful eye and ready tongue,
"Some brave youth ready to dare, do and die,
"You shall run off and merrily reach Rome
"Where we may live like flies in honey pot"—
Such being exact the programme of the course
Imputed her as carried to effect

They also say,—to keep her straight therein,
All sort of torture was piled, pain on pain,
On either side Pompilia's path of life,
Built round about and over against by fear,
Circumvallated month by month, and week
By week, and day by day, and hour by hour,
Close, closer and yet closer still with pain,
No outlet from the encroaching pain save just
Where stood one saviour like a piece of heaven,
Hell's arms would strain round but for this blue gap
She, they say further, first tried every chink,
Every imaginable break i' the fire,
As way of escape ran to the Commissary,
Who bade her not malign his friend her spouse,
Flung herself thrice at the Archbishop's feet,

Where three times the Archbishop let her lie,
Spend her whole sorrow and sob full heart forth,
And then took up the slight load from the ground
And bore it back for husband to chastise,—
Mildly of course,—but natural right is right
So went she slipping ever yet catching at help,
Missing the high till come to lowest and last,
To-wit a certain friar of mean degree,
Who heard her story in confession, wept,
Crossed himself, showed the man within the monk
"Then, will you save me, you the one i' the world?
"I cannot even write my woes, nor put
"My prayer for help in words a friend may read,—
"I no more own a coin than have an hour
"Free of observance,—I was watched to church,
"Am watched now, shall be watched back presently,—
"How buy the skill of scribe i' the market-place?
"Pray you, write down and send whatever I say
"O' the need I have my parents take me hence!"
The good man rubbed his eyes and could not choose—
Let her dictate her letter in such a sense
That parents, to save breaking down a wall,
Might lift her over she went back, heaven in heart
Then the good man took counsel of his couch,
Woke and thought twice, the second thought the best
"Here am I, foolish body that I be,

" Caught all but pushing, teaching, who but I,
" My betters their plain duty,—what, I dare
" Help a case the Archbishop would not help,
" Mend matters, peradventure, God loves mar?
" What hath the married life but strifes and plagues
" For proper dispensation? So a fool
" Once touched the ark,—poor Uzzah that I am!
" Oh married ones, much rather should I bid,
" In patience all of ye possess your souls!
" This life is brief and troubles die with it
" Where were the prick to soar up homeward else?"
So saying, he burnt the letter he had writ,
Said *Ave* for her intention, in its place,
Took snuff and comfort, and had done with all
Then the grim arms stretched yet a little more
And each touched each, all but one streak i' the midst,
Whereat stood Caponsacchi, who cried, " This way,
" Out by me! Hesitate one moment more
" And the fire shuts out me and shuts in you!
" Here my hand holds you life out!" Whereupon
She clasped the hand, which closed on hers and drew
Pompilia out o' the circle now complete
Whose fault or shame but Guido's?—ask her friends

But then this is the wife's—Pompilia's tale—
Eve's . no, not Eve's since Eve, to speak the truth,

Was hardly fallen (our candour might pronounce)
When simply saying in her own defence
"The serpent tempted me and I did eat"
So much of paradisal nature, Eve's!
Her daughters ever since prefer to urge
"Adam so starved me I was fain accept
"The apple any serpent pushed my way"
What an elaborate theory have we here,
Ingeniously nursed up, pretentiously
Brought forth, pushed forward amid trumpet-blast,
To account for the thawing of an icicle,
Show us there needed Ætna vomit flame
Ere run the crystal into dew-drops! Else,
How, unless hell broke loose to cause the step,
How could a married lady go astray?
Bless the fools! And 't is just this way they are blessed,
And the world wags still,—because fools are sure
—Oh, not of my wife nor your daughter! No!
But of their own the case is altered quite
Look now,—last week, the lady we all love,—
Daughter o' the couple we all venerate,
Wife of the husband we all cap before,
Mother o' the babes we all breathe blessings on,—
Was caught in converse with a negro page
Hell thawed that icicle, else "Why was it—

"Why?" asked and echoed the fools "Because, you fools,—"
So did the dame's self answer, she who could,
With that fine candour only forthcoming
When 't is no odds whether withheld or no—
"Because my husband was the saint you say,
"And,—with that childish goodness, absurd faith,
"Stupid self-satisfaction, you so praise,—
"Saint to you, insupportable to me
"Had he,—instead of calling me fine names,
"Lucretia and Susanna and so forth,
"And curtaining Correggio carefully
"Lest I be taught that Leda had two legs,—
"—But once never so little tweaked my nose
"For peeping through my fan at Carnival,
"Confessing thereby 'I have no easy task—
"'I need use all my powers to hold you mine,
"'And then,—why 't is so doubtful if they serve,
"'That—take this, as an earnest of despair!'
"Why, we were quits I had wiped the harm away,
"Thought 'The man fears me!' and foregone revenge"
We must not want all this elaborate work
To solve the problem why young Fancy-and-flesh
Slips from the dull side of a spouse in years,
Betakes it to the breast of Brisk-and-bold
Whose love-scrapes furnish talk for all the town!

Accordingly one word on the other side
Tips over the piled-up fabric of a tale
Guido says—that is, always, his friends say—
It is unlikely, from the wickedness,
That any man treat any woman so
The letter in question was her very own,
Unprompted and unaided she could write—
As able to write as ready to sin, or free,
When there was danger, to deny both facts
He bids you mark, herself from first to last
Attributes all the so-styled torture just
To jealousy,—jealousy of whom but just
This very Caponsacchi! How suits here
This with the other alleged motive, Prince?
Would Guido make a terror of the man
He meant should tempt the woman, as they charge?
Do you fright your hare that you may catch your hare?
Consider too, the charge was made and met
At the proper time and place where proofs were plain—
Heard patiently and disposed of thoroughly
By the highest powers, possessors of most light,
The Governor for the law, and the Archbishop
For the gospel which acknowledged primacies,
'T is impudently pleaded, he could warp
Into a tacit partnership with crime—
He being the while, believe their own account,

Impotent, penniless and miserable!
He further asks—Duke, note the knotty point!—
How he,—concede him skill to play such part
And drive his wife into a gallant's arms,—
Could bring the gallant to play his part too
And stand with arms so opportunely wide?
How bring this Caponsacchi,—with whom, friends
And foes alike agree, throughout his life
He never interchanged a civil word
Nor lifted courteous cap to—him how bend
To such observancy of beck and call,
—To undertake this strange and perilous feat
For the good of Guido, using, as the lure,
Pompilia whom, himself and she avouch,
He had nor spoken with nor seen, indeed,
Beyond sight in a public theatre,
When she wrote letters (she that could not write!)
The importunate shamelessly-protested love
Which brought him, though reluctant, to her feet,
And forced on him the plunge which, howsoe'er
She might swim up i' the whirl, must bury him
Under abysmal black a priest contrive
No better, no amour to be hushed up,
But open flight and noon-day infamy?
Try and concoct defence for such revolt!
Take the wife's tale as true, say she was wronged,—

Pray, in what rubric of the breviary
Do you find it registered—the part of a priest
Is—that to right wrongs from the church he skip,
Go journeying with a woman that 's a wife,
And be pursued, o'ertaken and captured . . how?
In a lay-dress, playing the kind sentinel
Where the wife sleeps (says he who best should know)
And sleeping, sleepless, both have spent the night!
Could no one else be found to serve at need—
No woman—or if man, no safer sort
Than this not well-reputed turbulence?

Then, look into his own account o' the case!
He, being the stranger and astonished one,
Yet received protestations of her love
From lady neither known nor cared about
Love, so protested, bred in him disgust
After the wonder,—or incredulity,
Such impudence seeming impossible
But, soon assured such impudence might be,
When he had seen with his own eyes at last
Letters thrown down to him i' the very street
From behind lattice where the lady lurked,
And read their passionate summons to her side—
Why then, a thousand thoughts swarmed up and in,—
How he had seen her once, a moment's space,

Observed she was both young and beautiful,
Heard everywhere report she suffered much
From a jealous husband thrice her age,—in short
There flashed the propriety, expediency
Of treating, trying might they come to terms,
—At all events, granting the interview
Prayed for, one so adapted to assist
Decision as to whether he advance,
Stand or retire, in his benevolent mood!
Therefore the interview befell at length,
And at this one and only interview,
He saw the sole and single course to take—
Bade her dispose of him, head, heart and hand,
Did her behest and braved the consequence,
Not for the natural end, the love of man
For woman whether love be virtue or vice,
But, please you, altogether for pity's sake—
Pity of innocence and helplessness!
And how did he assure himself of both?
Had he been the house-inmate, visitor,
Eye-witness of the described martyrdom,
So, competent to pronounce its remedy
Ere rush on such extreme and desperate course—
Involving such enormity of harm,
Moreover, to the husband judged thus, doomed
And damned without a word in his defence?

Not he! the truth was felt by instinct here,
—Process which saves a world of trouble and time
There 's the priest's story what do you say to it,
Trying its truth by your own instinct too,
Since that 's to be the expeditious mode?
" And now, do hear my version," Guido cries
' I accept argument and inference both
" It would indeed have been miraculous
" Had such a confidency sprung to birth
" With no more fanning from acquaintanceship
" Than here avowed by my wife and this priest
' Only, it did not you must substitute
" The old stale unromantic way of fault,
" The commonplace adventure, mere intrigue
" In prose form with the unpoetic tricks,
" Cheatings and lies they used the hackney chair
" Satan jaunts forth with, shabby and serviceable,
" No gilded gimcrack-novelty from below,
" To bowl you along thither, swift and sure
" That same officious go-between, the wench
" Who gave and took the letters of the two,
" Now offers self and service back to me
" Bears testimony to visits night by night
" When all was safe, the husband far and away,—
" To many a timely slipping out at large
" By light o' the morning-star, ere he should wake

" And when the fugitives were found at last,
" Why, with them were found also, to belie
" What protest they might make of innocence,
" All documents yet wanting, if need were,
" To establish guilt in them, disgrace in me—
" The chronicle o' the converse from its rise
" To culmination in this outrage read!
" Letters from wife to priest, from priest to wife,—
" Here they are, read and say where they chime in
" With the other tale, superlative purity
" O' the pair of saints! I stand or fall by these "

But then on the other side again,—how say
The pair of saints? That not one word is theirs—
No syllable o' the batch or writ or sent
Or yet received by either of the two
" Found," says the priest, " because he needed them,
" Failing all other proofs, to prove our fault
" So, here they are, just as is natural
" Oh yes—we had our missives, each of us!
" Not these, but to the full as vile, no doubt
" Hers as from me,—she could not read, so burnt,—
" Mine as from her,—I burnt because I read
" Who forged and found them? *Cui profuerint!*"
(I take the phrase out of your Highness' mouth)
" He who would gain by her fault and my fall,

" The trickster, schemer and pretender—he
" Whose whole career was lie entailing lie
" Sought to be sealed truth by the worst lie last!"

Guido rejoins—" Did the other end o' the tale
" Match this beginning! 'T is alleged I prove
" A murderer at the end, a man of force
" Prompt, indiscriminate, effectual good!
" Then what need all this trifling woman's-work,
" Letters and embassies and weak intrigue,
" When will and power were mine to end at once
" Safely and surely? Murder had come first
" Not last with such a man, assure yourselves!
" The silent *acquetta*, stilling at command—
' A drop a day i' the wine or soup, the dose,—
" The shattering beam that breaks above the bed
" And beats out brains, with nobody to blame
" Except the wormy age which eats even oak,—
" Nay, the staunch steel or trusty cord,—who cares
" I' the blind old palace, a pitfall at each step,
" With none to see, much more to interpose
" O' the two, three, creeping house-dog-servant-things
" Born mine and bred mine? Had I willed gross death,
" I had found nearer paths to thrust him prey
" Than this that goes meandering here and there
" Through half the world and calls down in its course

" Notice and noise,—hate, vengeance, should it fail,
" Derision and contempt though it succeed!
" Moreover, what o' the future son and heir?
' The unborn babe about to be called mine,—
" What end in heaping all this shame on him,
" Were I indifferent to my own black share?
" Would I have tried these crookednesses, say,
" Willing and able to effect the straight?"

" Ay, would you!"—one may hear the priest retort,
" Being as you are, i' the stock, a man of guile,
" And ruffianism but an added graft
" You, a born coward, try a coward's arms,
" Trick and chicane,—and only when these fail
" Does violence follow and like fox you bite
" Caught out in stealing Also, the disgrace
" You hardly shrunk at, wholly shrivelled her
" You plunged her thin white delicate hand i' the flame
" Along with your coarse horny brutish fist,
" Held them a second there, then drew out both
" —Yours roughed a little, hers ruined through and through
" Your hurt would heal forthwith at ointment's touch—
" Namely, succession to the inheritance
" Which bolder crime had lost you let things change,
" The birth o' the boy warrant the bolder crime,

" Why, murder was determined, dared and done.
" For me," the priest proceeds with his reply,
" The look o' the thing, the chances of mistake,
" All were against me,—that, I knew the first
" But, knowing also what my duty was,
" I did it I must look to men more skilled
" In reading hearts than ever was the world "

Highness, decide! Pronounce, Her Excellency!
Or even leave this argument in doubt,
Account it a fit matter, taken up
With all its faces, manifold enough,
To ponder on—what fronts us, the next stage,
Next legal process? Guido, in pursuit,
Coming up with the fugitives at the inn,
Caused both to be arrested then and there
And sent to Rome for judgment on the case—
Thither, with all his armoury of proofs,
Betook himself 't is there we 'll meet him now,
Waiting the further issue
Here you smile
" And never let him henceforth dare to plead,—
" Of all pleas and excuses in the world
" For any deed hereafter to be done,—
" His irrepressible wrath at honour's wound!
" Passion and madness irrepressible?

" Why, Count and cavalier, the husband comes
" And catches foe i' the very act of shame!
" There 's man to man,—nature must have her way,—
" We look he should have cleared things on the spot.
" Yes, then, indeed—even tho' it prove he erred—
" Though the ambiguous first appearance, mount
" Of solid injury, melt soon to mist,
" Still,—had he slain the lover and the wife—
" Or, since she was a woman and his wife,
" Slain him, but stript her naked to the skin
" Or at best left no more of an attire
" Than patch sufficient to pin paper to,
" Some one love-letter, infamy and all,
" As passport to the Paphos fit for such,
" Safe-conduct to her natural home the stews,—
" Good! One had recognized the power o' the pulse
" But when he stands, the stock-fish,—sticks to law—
" Offers the hole in his heart, all fresh and warm,
" For scrivener's pen to poke and play about—
" Can stand, can stare, can tell his beads perhaps,
" Oh, let us hear no syllable o' the rage!
" Such rage were a convenient afterthought
" For one who would have shown his teeth belike,
" Exhibited unbridled rage enough,
" Had but the priest been found, as was to hope,
" In serge, not silk, with crucifix, not sword

" Whereas the grey innocuous grub, of yore,
" Had hatched a hornet, tickle to the touch,
" The priest was metamorphosed into knight
" And even the timid wife, whose cue was—shriek,
" Bury her brow beneath his trampling foot,—
" She too sprang at him like a pythoness
" So, gulp down rage, passion must be postponed,
" Calm be the word! Well, our word is—we brand
" This part o' the business, howsoever the rest
" Befall"
" Nay," interpose as prompt his friends—
" This is the world's way! So you adjudge reward
" To the forbearance and legality
" Yourselves begin by inculcating—ay,
" Exacting from us all with knife at throat!
" This one wrong more you add to wrong's amount,—
" You publish all, with the kind comment here,
" 'Its victim was too cowardly for revenge'"
Make it your own case,—you who stand apart!
The husband wakes one morn from heavy sleep,
With a taste of poppy in his mouth,—rubs eyes,
Finds his wife flown, his strong box ransacked too,
Follows as he best can, overtakes i' the end
You bid him use his privilege well, it seems
He 's scarce cool-blooded enough for the right move—
Does not shoot when the game were sure, but stands

Bewildered at the critical minute,—since
He has the first flash of the fact alone
To judge from, act with, not the steady lights
Of after-knowledge,—yours who stand at ease
To try conclusions he 's in smother and smoke,
You outside, with explosion at an end
The sulphur may be lightning or a squib—
He 'll know in a minute, but till then, he doubts
Back from what you know to what he knew not!
Hear the priest's lofty "I am innocent,"
The wife's as resolute "You are guilty!" Come!
Are you not staggered?—pause, and you lose the move!
Nought left you but a low appeal to law,
"Coward" tied to your tail for compliment!
Another consideration have it your way!
Admit the worst his courage failed the Count,
He 's cowardly like the best o' the burgesses
He 's grown incorporate with,—a very cur,
Kick him from out your circle by all means!
Why, trundled down this reputable stair,
Still, the Church-door lies wide to take him in,
And the Court-porch also in he sneaks to each,—
"Yes, I have lost my honour and my wife,
"And, being moreover an ignoble hound,
"I dare not jeopardize my life for them!"
Religion and Law lean forward from their chairs,

"Well done, thou good and faithful servant!" Ay,
Not only applaud him that he scorned the world,
But punish should he dare do otherwise
If the case be clear or turbid,—you must say!

Thus, anyhow, it mounted to the stage
In the law-courts,—let 's see clearly from this point!—
Where the priest tells his story true or false,
And the wife her story, and the husband his,
All with result as happy as before
The courts would nor condemn nor yet acquit
This, that or the other, in so distinct a sense
As end the strife to either's absolute loss
Pronounced, in place of something definite,
"Each of the parties, whether goat or sheep
"I' the main, has wool to show and hair to hide
"Each has brought somehow trouble, is somehow cause
"Of pains enough,—even though no worse were proved.
"Here is a husband, cannot rule his wife
"Without provoking her to scream and scratch
"And scour the fields,—causelessly, it may be
"Here is that wife,—who makes her sex our plague,
"Wedlock, our bugbear,—perhaps with cause enough·
"And here is the truant priest o' the trio, worst
"Or best—each quality being conceivable
"Let us impose a little mulct on each

" We punish youth in state of pupilage
" Who talk at hours when youth is bound to sleep,
" Whether the prattle turn upon Saint Rose
" Or Donna Olimpia of the Vatican
" 'T is talk, talked wisely or unwisely talked,
" I' the dormitory where to talk at all,
" Transgresses, and is mulct as here we mean
" For the wife,—let her betake herself, for rest,
" After her run, to a House of Convertites—
" Keep there, as good as real imprisonment
" Being sick and tired, she will recover so
" For the priest, spritely strayer out of bounds,
" Who made Arezzo hot to hold him,—Rome
" Profits by his withdrawal from the scene
" Let him be relegate to Civita,
" Circumscribed by its bounds till matters mend
" There he at least lies out o' the way of harm
" From foes—perhaps from the too friendly fair
" And finally for the husband, whose rash rule
" Has but itself to blame for this ado,—
" If he be vexed that, in our judgments dealt,
" He fails obtain what he accounts his right,
" Let him go comforted with the thought, no less,
" That, turn each sentence howsoever he may,
" There 's satisfaction to extract therefrom
" For, does he wish his wife proved innocent?

"Well, she 's not guilty, he may safely urge,
"Has missed the stripes dishonest wives endure—
"This being a fatherly pat o' the cheek, no more
"Does he wish her guilty? Were she otherwise
"Would she be locked up, set to say her prayers,
"Prevented intercourse with the outside world,
"And that suspected priest in banishment,
"Whose portion is a further help i' the case?
"Oh, ay, you all of you want the other thing,
"The extreme of law, some verdict neat, complete,—
"Either, the whole o' the dowry in your poke
"With full release from the false wife, to boot,
"And heading, hanging for the priest, beside—
"Or, contrary, claim freedom for the wife,
"Repayment of each penny paid her spouse,
"Amends for the past, release for the future! Such
"Is wisdom to the children of this world,
"But we 've no mind, we children of the light,
"To miss the advantage of the golden mean,
"And push things to the steel point" Thus the courts

Is it settled so far? Settled or disturbed,
Console yourselves 't is like an instance, now!
You 've seen the puppets, of Place Navona, play,—
Punch and his mate,—how threats pass, blows are dealt,
And a crisis comes the crowd or clap or hiss

Accordingly as disposed for man or wife—
When down the actors duck awhile perdue,
Donning what novel rag and-feather trim
Best suits the next adventure, new effect
And,—by the time the mob is on the move,
With something like a judgment *pro* and *con*,—
There 's a whistle, up again the actors pop
In t' other tatter with fresh-tinseled staves,
To re engage in one last worst fight more
Shall show, what you thought tragedy was farce
Note, that the climax and the crown of things
Invariably is, the devil appears himself,
Armed and accoutred, horns and hoofs and tail!
Just so, nor otherwise it proved—you 'll see
Move to the murder, never mind the rest!

Guido, at such a general duck-down,
I' the breathing-space,—of wife to convent here,
Priest to his relegation, and himself
To Arezzo,—had resigned his part perforce
To brother Abate, who bustled, did his best,
Retrieved things somewhat, managed the three suits—
Since, it should seem, there were three suits-at-law
Behoved him look to, still, lest bad grow worse
First civil suit,—the one the parents brought,
Impugning the legitimacy of his wife,

Affirming thence the nullity of her rights
This was before the Rota,—Molinès,
That 's judge there, made that notable decree
Which partly leaned to Guido, as I said,—
But Pietro had appealed against the same
To the very court will judge what we judge now—
Tommati and his fellows,—Suit the first
Next civil suit,—demand on the wife's part
Of separation from the husband's bed
On plea of cruelty and risk to life—
Claims restitution of the dowry paid,
Immunity from paying any more
This second, the Vicegerent has to judge
Third and last suit,—this time, a criminal one,—
Answer to, and protection from, both these,—
Guido's complaint of guilt against his wife
In the Tribunal of the Governor,
Venturini, also judge of the present cause
Three suits of all importance plaguing him,
Beside a little private enterprise
Of Guido's,—essay at a shorter cut
For Paolo, knowing the right way at Rome,
Had, even while superintending these three suits
I' the regular way, each at its proper court,
Ingeniously made interest with the Pope
To set such tedious regular forms aside,

And, acting the supreme and ultimate judge,
Declare for the husband and against the wife
Well, at such crisis and extreme of straits,—
The man at bay, buffeted in this wise,—
Happened the strangest accident of all
" Then," sigh friends, " the last feather broke his back,
" Made him forget all possible remedies
" Save one—he rushed to, as the sole relief
" From horror and the abominable thing "
" Or rather," laugh foes, " then did there befall
" The luckiest of conceivable events,
" Most pregnant with impunity for him,
" Which henceforth turned the flank of all attack,
" And bade him do his wickedest and worst "
—The wife's withdrawal from the Convertites,
Visit to the villa where her parents lived,
And birth there of his babe Divergence here!
I simply take the facts, ask what they show

First comes this thunderclap of a surprise
Then follow all the signs and silences
Premonitory of earthquake Paolo first
Vanished, was swept off somewhere, lost to Rome
(Wells dry up, while the sky is sunny and blue)
Then Guido girds himself for enterprise,
Hies to Vittiano, counsels with his steward,

Comes to terms with four peasants young and bold,
And starts for Rome the Holy, reaches her
At very holiest, for 't is Christmas Eve,
And makes straight for the Abate's dried up font,
The lodge where Paolo ceased to work the pipes
And then, rest taken, observation made
And plan completed, all in a grim week,
The five proceed in a body, reach the place,
—Pietro's, at the Paolina, silent, lone,
And stupefied by the propitious snow
'T is one i' the evening knock a voice "Who 's there?"
"Friends with a letter from the priest your friend"
At the door, straight smiles old Violante's self
She falls,—her son in law stabs through and through,
Reaches through her at Pietro—"With your son
"This is the way to settle suits, good sire!"
He bellows "Mercy for heaven, not for earth!
"Leave to confess and save my sinful soul,
"Then do your pleasure on the body of me!"
—"Nay, father, soul with body must take its chance!"
He presently got his portion and lay still
And last, Pompilia rushes here and there
Like a dove among the lightnings in her brake,
Falls also Guido's, this last husband's-act.
He lifts her by the long dishevelled hair,
Holds her away at arm's length with one hand,

While the other tries if life come from the mouth-
Looks out his whole heart's hate on the shut eyes,
Draws a deep satisfied breath, "So—dead at last!"
Throws down the burden on dead Pietro's knees,
And ends all with "Let us away, my boys!"

And, as they left by one door, in at the other
Tumbled the neighbours—for the shrieks had pierced
To the mill and the grange, this cottage and that shed
Soon followed the Public Force, pursuit began
Though Guido had the start and chose the road
So, that same night was he, with the other four,
Overtaken near Baccano,—where they sank
By the way-side, in some shelter meant for beasts,
And now lay heaped together, nuzzling swine,
Each wrapped in bloody cloak, each grasping still
His unwiped weapon, sleeping all the same
The sleep o' the just,—a journey of twenty miles
Brought just and unjust to a level, you see
The only one i' the world that suffered aught
By the whole night's toil and trouble, flight and chase,
Was just the officer who took them, Head
O' the Public Force,—Patrizj, zealous soul,
Who, having but duty to sustain weak flesh,
Got heated, caught a fever and so died

A warning to the over-vigilant,
—Virtue in a chafe should change her linen quick,
Lest pleurisy get start of providence
(That 's for the Cardinal, and told, I think !)

Well, they bring back the company to Rome
Says Guido, " By your leave, I fain would ask
" How you found out 't was I who did the deed ?
" What put you on my trace, a foreigner,
" Supposed in Arezzo,—and assuredly safe
" Except for an oversight who told you, pray ? "
" Why, naturally your wife ! " Down Guido drops
O' the horse he rode,—they have to steady and stay,
At either side the brute that bore him bound,
So strange it seemed his wife should live and speak !
She had prayed—at least so people tell you now—
For but one thing to the Virgin for herself,
Not simply,—as did Pietro 'mid the stabs,—
Time to confess and get her own soul saved
But time to make the truth apparent, truth
For God's sake, lest men should believe a lie
Which seems to have been about the single prayer
She ever put up, that was granted her
With this hope in her head, of telling truth,—
Being familiarized with pain, beside,—
She bore the stabbing to a certain pitch

Without a useless cry, was flung for dead
On Pietro's lap, and so attained her point
Her friends subjoin this—have I done with them?—
And cite the miracle of continued life
(She was not dead when I arrived just now)
As attestation to her probity

Does it strike your Excellency? Why, your Highness,
The self-command and even the final prayer,
Our candour must acknowledge explicable
As easily by the consciousness of guilt
So, when they add that her confession runs
She was of wifehood one white innocence
In thought, word, act, from first of her short life
To last of it, praying, i' the face of death,
That God forgive her other sins—not this,
She is charged with and must die for, that she failed
Anyway to her husband while thereon
Comments the old Religious—"So much good,
"Patience beneath enormity of ill,
"I hear to my confusion, woe is me,
"Sinner that I stand, shamed in the walk and gait
"I have practised and grown old in, by a child!"—
Guido's friends shrug the shoulder, "Just this same
"Prodigious absolute calm in the last hour
"Confirms us,—being the natural result

Of a life which proves consistent to the close
" Having braved heaven and deceived earth throughout,
' She braves still and deceives still, gains thereby
' Two ends, she prizes beyond earth or heaven
" First sets her lover free, imperilled sore
" By the new turn things take he answers yet
" For the part he played they have summoned him indeed
" The past ripped up, he may be punished still
" What better way of saving him than this?
' Then,—thus she dies revenged to the uttermost
" On Guido, drags him with her in the dark,
" The lower still the better, do you doubt?
" Thus, two ways, does she love her love to the end,
" And hate her hate,—death, hell is no such price
" To pay for these,—lovers and haters hold "
But there 's another parry for the thrust
" Confession," cry folks—" a confession, think!
" Confession of the moribund is true!"
Which of them, my wise friends? This public one,
Or the private other we shall never know?
The private may contain,—your casuists teach,-
The acknowledgment of, and the penitence for,
That other public one, so people say
However it be,—we trench on delicate ground,
Her Eminence is peeping o'er the cards,—

Can one find nothing in behalf of this
Catastrophe? Deaf folks accuse the dumb!
You criticize the drunken reel, fool's speech,
Maniacal gesture of the man,— we grant!
But who poured poison in his cup, we ask?
Recall the list of his excessive wrongs,
First cheated in his wife, robbed by her kin,
Rendered anon the laughing-stock o' the world
By the story true or false, of his wife's birth,—
The last seal publicly apposed to shame
By the open flight of wife and priest,—why, Sirs,
Step out of Rome a furlong, would you know
What another guess tribunal than ours here,
Mere worldly Court without the help of grace,
Thinks of just that one incident o' the flight?
Guido preferred the same complaint before
The court at Arezzo, bar of the Granduke,—
In virtue of it being Tuscany
Where the offence had rise and flight began,—
Self-same complaint he made in the sequel here
Where the offence grew to the full, the flight
Ended offence and flight, one fact judged twice
By two distinct tribunals,—what result?
There was a sentence passed at the same time
By Arezzo and confirmed by the Granduke,
Which nothing baulks of swift and sure effect

But absence of the guilty, (flight to Rome
Frees them from Tuscan jurisdiction now)
—Condemns the wife to the opprobrious doom
Of all whom law just lets escape from death
The Stinche, House of Punishment, for life,—
That 's what the wife deserves in Tuscany
Here, she deserves—remitting with a smile
To her father's house, main object of the flight!
The thief presented with the thing he steals!

At this discrepancy of judgments—mad,
The man took on himself the office, judged,
And the only argument against the use
O' the law he thus took into his own hands
Is what, I ask you?—that, revenging wrong,
He did not revenge sooner, kill at first
Whom he killed last! That is the final charge
Sooner? What 's soon or late i' the case?—ask we
A wound i' the flesh no doubt wants prompt redress,
It smarts a little to-day, well in a week,
Forgotten in a month, or never, or now, revenge!
But a wound to the soul? That rankles worse and worse
Shall I comfort you, explaining—"Not this once
"But now it may be some five hundred times
"I called you ruffian, pandar, liar and rogue

"The injury must be less by lapse of time?"
The wrong is a wrong, one and immortal too,
And that you bore it those five hundred times,
Let it rankle unrevenged five hundred years,
Is just five hundred wrongs the more and worse!
Men, plagued this fashion, get to explode this way,
If left no other

"But we left this man
"Many another way, and there 's his fault,"
'T is answered—"He himself preferred our arm
"O' the law to fight his battle with No doubt
"We did not open him an armoury
"To pick and choose from, use, and then reject
"He tries one weapon and fails,—he tries the next
"And next he flourishes wit and common sense,
"They fail him,—he plies logic doughtily,
"It fails him too,—thereon, discovers last
"He has been blind to the combustibles—
"That all the while he is a-glow with ire,
"Boiling with irrepressible rage, and so
"May try explosives and discard cold steel,—
"So hires assassins, plots, plans, executes!
"Is this the honest self-forgetting rage
"We are called to pardon? Does the furious bull
"Pick out four help-mates from the grazing herd

"And journey with them over hill and dale
"Till he find his enemy?"

What rejoinder? save
That friends accept our bull-similitude
Bull-like,—the indiscriminate slaughter, rude
And reckless aggravation of revenge,
Were all i' the way o the brute who never once
Ceases, amid all provocation more,
To bear in mind the first tormentor, first
Giver o' the wound that goaded him to fight
And, though a dozen follow and reinforce
The aggressor, wound in front and wound in flank,
Continues undisturbedly pursuit,
And only after prostrating his prize
Turns on the pettier, makes a general prey
So Guido rushed against Violante, first
Author of all his wrongs, *fons et origo*
Malorum—drops first, deluge since,—which done,
He finished with the rest Do you blame a bull?

In truth you look as puzzled as ere I preached!
How is that? There are difficulties perhaps
On any supposition, and either side
Each party wants too much, claims sympathy
For its object of compassion, more than just

Cry the wife's friends, " O the enormous crime
" Caused by no provocation in the world ! "
" Was not the wife a little weak ? "—inquire—
" Punished extravagantly, if you please,
" But meriting a little punishment ?
" One treated inconsiderately, say,
" Rather than one deserving not at all
" Treatment and discipline o' the harsher sort ? "
No, they must have her purity itself,
Quite angel,—and her parents angels too
Of an aged sort, immaculate, word and deed
At all events, so seeming, till the fiend,
Even Guido, by his folly, forced from them
The untoward avowal of the trick o' the birth,
Which otherwise were safe and secret now
Why, here you have the awfulest of crimes
For nothing ! Hell broke loose on a butterfly !
A dragon born of rose-dew and the moon !
Yet here is the monster ! Why he 's a mere man—
Born, bred and brought up in the usual way
His mother loves him, still his brothers stick
To the good fellow of the boyish games,
The Governor of his town knows and approves,
The Archbishop of the place knows and assists
Here he has Cardinal This to vouch for the past,
Cardinal That to trust for the future,—match

And marriage were a Cardinal's making,—in short,
What if a tragedy be acted here
Impossible for malice to improve,
And innocent Guido with his innocent four
Be added, all five, to the guilty three,
That we of these last days be edified
With one full taste o' the justice of the world?

The long and the short is, truth seems what I show —
Undoubtedly no pains ought to be spared
To give the mob an inkling of our lights
It seems unduly harsh to put the man
To the torture, as I hear the court intends,
Though readiest way of twisting out the truth,
He is noble, and he may be innocent
On the other hand, if they exempt the man
(As it is also said they hesitate
On the fair ground, presumptive guilt is weak
I' the case of nobility and privilege),—
What crime that ever was, ever will be,
Deserves the torture? Then abolish it!
You see the reduction *ad absurdum*, Sirs?

Her Excellency must pronounce, in fine!
What, she prefers going and joining play?
Her Highness finds it late, intends retire?

I am of their mind only, all this talk talked,
'T was not for nothing that we talked, I hope?
Both know as much about it, now, at least,
As all Rome no particular thanks, I beg!
(You 'll see, I have not so advanced myself,
After my teaching the two idiots here!)

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